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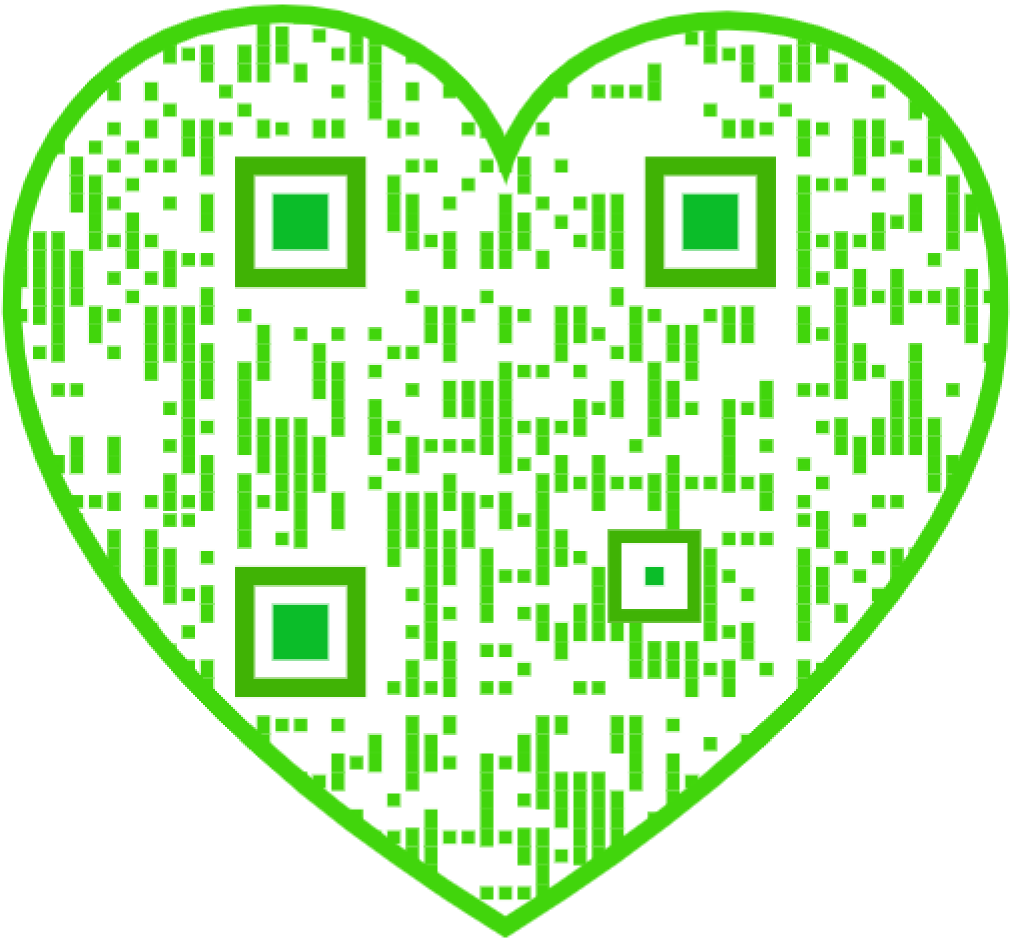

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COMMENT

THE FORD–VW TIE-UP HAS BEEN A WIN-WIN

A Ford can't be a true Ford if it has Volkswagen underpinnings. Or so thought Steve Cropley, for reasons he explains in his story about a recent road trip he took in an Explorer – a car with a Blue Oval badge but built on a VW platform (p46). No doubt that's a view shared by many diehard Ford advocates, who've seen the brand evolve from an era-defining automotive pioneer in the mid-1900s to a modern-day powerhouse.

But however successful a firm is, it cannot rest on its laurels and Ford's reluctance to adapt to motoring's rapidly changing landscape has left it in trouble in recent years, particularly in Europe.

The Ford and VW tie-up, announced in 2020, was big news. That these two high-fliers had wised up to the benefits of sharing know-how and parts development was a humbling moment: no longer only arch-rivals but now partners who realised how much could be mutually beneficial.

Cropley's evolved opinion of the deal must surely reflect that of the industry itself. Never has there been a more challenging time than during the past few years. If firms like Ford and VW can work together effectively and – importantly – still produce distinctive and likeable vehicles such as the Explorer, then everyone wins.

Rachel Burgess, magazine editor
rachel.burgess@haymarket.com

Meanwhile, online…

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Prior on Morgan Supersport
It's so well sorted that Morgan reckons you can genuinely use it as a second car, rather than a third. Does Matt Prior agree?

Street cars named desire
Veyron, F40, Aeromax, Chevy Bel Air, MG A Speedster (pictured)… Here are our photographers' favourite car spots on UK streets this year.

Take two: Suzuki Jimny
What's better than a Suzuki Jimny? Two Suzuki Jimnys. We compare a modern Jimny with a 1980s 'SJ410', on and off road.

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"I went hunting for a creep function for the transmission and came away with a cure for my hay fever"
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GOT A STORY Email our news editor
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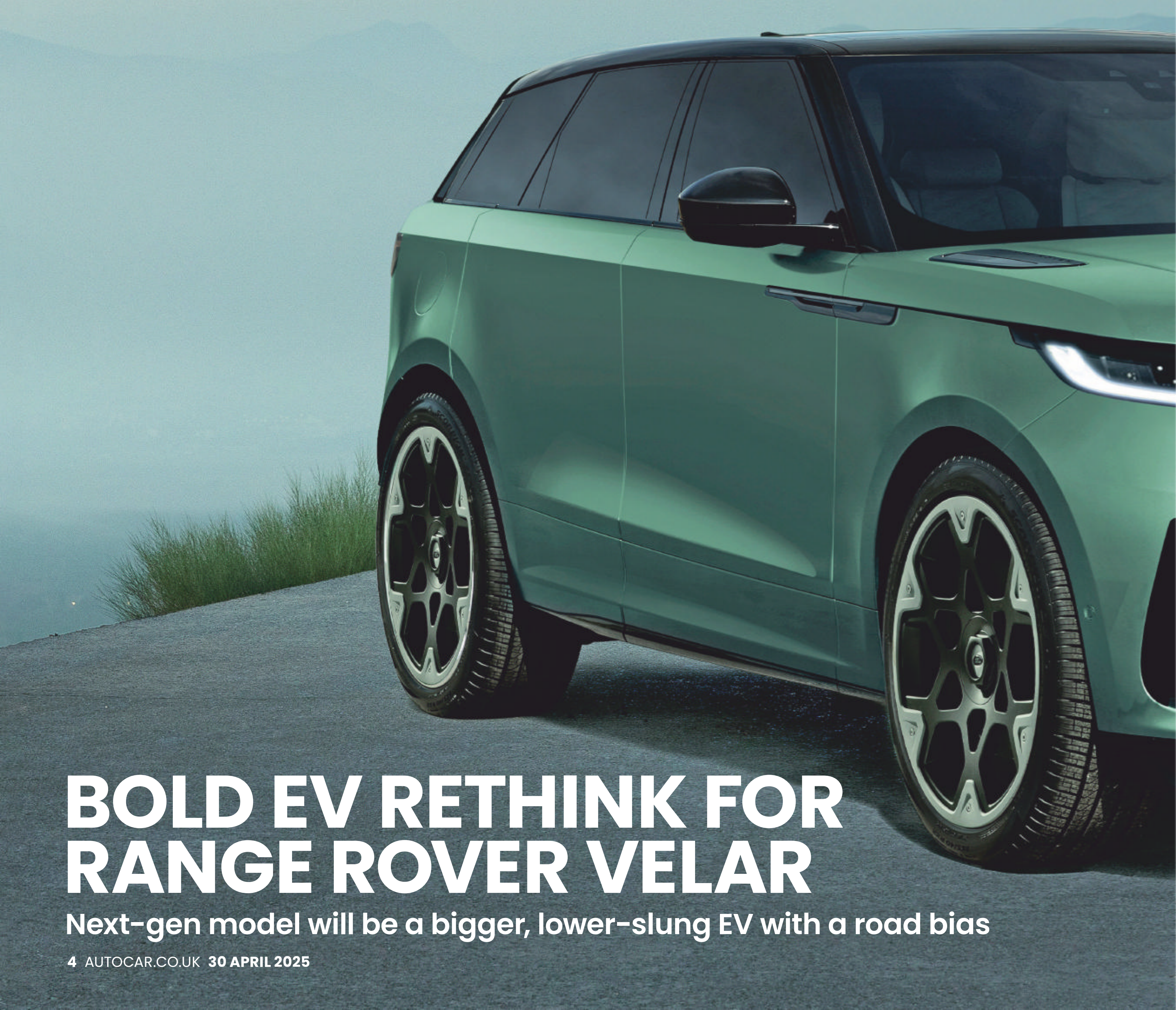


BOLD EV RETHINK FOR RANGE ROVER VELAR

Next-gen model will be a bigger, lower-slung EV with a road bias

The Range Rover Velar will undergo a radical makeover next year, with electric power and a genre-bending new body shape that will depart from its traditional SUV roots.

It is slated to be launched just a few months after the electric versions of the Range Rover and Range Rover Sport. But while those models will be virtually identical to their combustion siblings, the Velar will adopt a rakish new profile that fuses elements of saloons and shooting brakes with the more upright silhouette of an SUV.

The Velar's international testing programme is now well under way and spy shots of prototypes suggest the upcoming car will be bigger than the current model, particularly in its length. That is no doubt in a bid to more obviously differentiate it from its Evoque and Range Rover Sport siblings – and potentially to free up space for a third row of seats.

It also appears to ride closer to the ground, which would cement its positioning as the 4x4 brand's most road-focused model and pitch it as a more obvious rival to the likes of the Porsche Macan Electric and BMW iX.

Before JLR embarked on its wide-reaching 'Reimagine' transformation strategy, it was understood to have been developing a low-slung electric 'Road Rover' model that would have given Range Rover a rival to the likes of the Mercedes S-Class and BMW 7 Series but with some off-road ability (Autocar, 9 October 2019). Plans for the Road Rover were put on ice when Jaguar scrapped the electric XJ it was to be twinned with, but the new Velar will adopt a similar ethos.

The interior will follow the full-size Range Rover with an emphasis on upmarket appeal and no doubt take influence from that car's minimalist, tech-centric layout with a focus on advanced functionality and high-quality materials. Such features are crucial to the success of any premium model in the competitive US, Middle Eastern and Chinese markets.

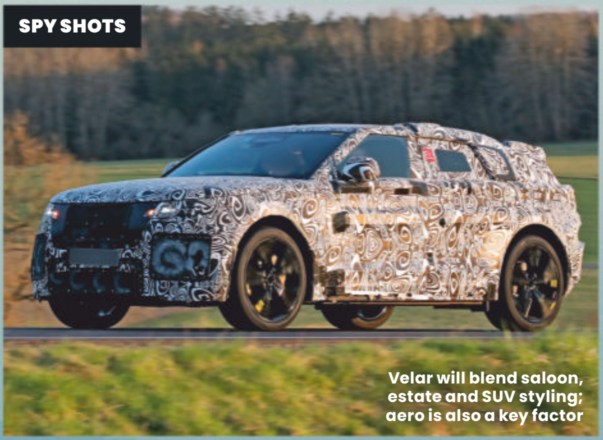
JLR is working hard to ensure clear boundaries between each of its model lines, with Defender, Discovery and Range Rover each now operating as separate brands with distinct characters – all under the 'trust mark' of

Land Rover. Range Rover will continue to be the most luxurious of the three, while Defender will lean on the go-anywhere abilities of its namesake model, and Discovery will be reinvented with a focus on family-friendly lifestyle credentials.

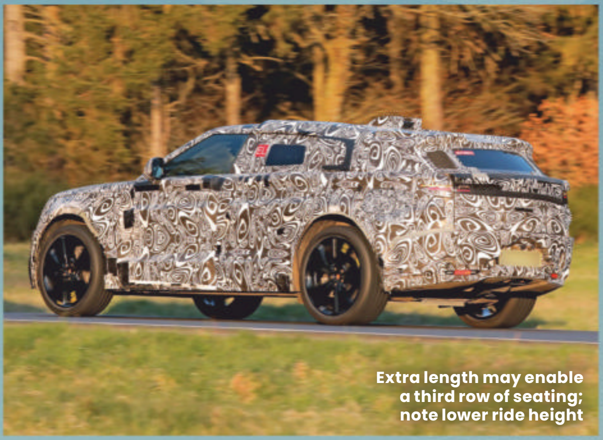
Redesigning and repositioning the Velar in line with that brand identity will be key to refreshing its image and boosting its appeal. At seven years old, the current Velar is the slowest-selling of the four Range Rover model lines. It notched up fewer than 24,000 sales in the year ending 31 March, compared with the smaller Evoque's 44,000. For reference, the Velar's petrol-powered Macan rival achieved nearly three times as many sales in the course of 2024 – its ninth full year on sale.

The Mk2 Velar's bold new look is backed by a total overhaul beneath the skin. The new crossover is set to be the first car to ride on the new 800V EMA platform that JLR has developed for electrified SUVs. The EMA platform will also be used for the next Evoque and the compact Defender 'Sport' model that's tipped to replace the Discovery Sport (Autocar, 16 April). All three cars are likely to be built at the company's factory in Halewood, Merseyside, which is undergoing a £500 million overhaul that will enable it to build EVs alongside ICE- and hybrid-powered models.

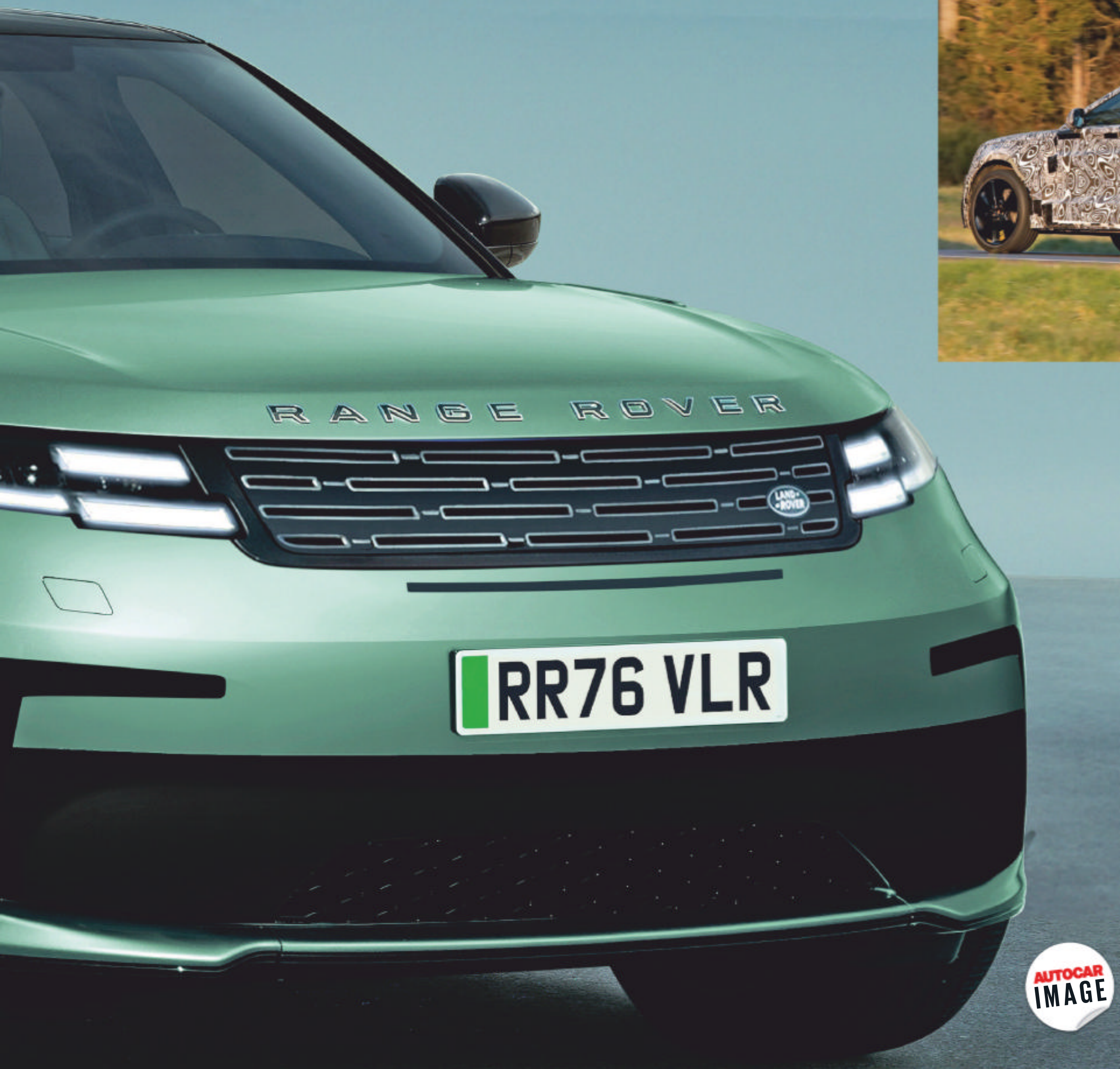
Technical details of the ▶



Velar will blend saloon, estate and SUV styling; aero is also a key factor



Extra length may enable a third row of seating; note lower ride height



◂ platform remain scarce but it will use a new generation of electric motors developed in-house by JLR and batteries supplied by the Agratas factory that JLR parent company Tata is building in Somerset.

It is understood that the initial plan is to launch the new Velar as an EV but the possibility of a future combustion version has not been ruled out. JLR announced last year that it was ramping up investment in new plug-in hybrid drivetrains in response to a "surprising" rise in demand, though it has not yet said whether the EMA platform will be able to accommodate them.

Earlier details of the EMA programme suggested it was being engineered to host a range-extender system that used a small petrol engine as a generator for a traction battery but it remains to be seen if JLR deems this a viable option.

While an exact launch date for the new Velar has not been officially confirmed, JLR CEO Adrian Mardell previously said the first EMA-based car is likely to arrive in around a year's time.

"We'll first have MLA BEV with the Range Rover EV later [in 2025]. Then it's the first vehicle off EMA, which will probably be springtime in 2026. Jaguar [the production version of the super-GT concept] will be after that," said Mardell.

Mk1 Velar: sales are sluggish

RANGIE RANGE REARRANGED

The Velar's arrival will form part of the most significant recalibration of the Range Rover brand in its 55-year history.

Arriving first will be the Range Rover Electric, which is understood to be scheduled for a debut before the end of the year. It will be based on the same versatile MLA platform as the ICE car, which was engineered from the off to accommodate an electric battery and motors. This will also be the case with the Range Rover Sport Electric, which is expected to be revealed soon after. The pair will share the Solihull production line with their combustion siblings.

These will be key models for the marque as its EV transition gathers pace. The pair, alongside the Defender, which is expected to gain an electric variant too, are JLR's most profitable and popular models globally and made up more than half of JLR's total output in 2024.

With some of the brand's key markets – notably the UK, the European Union and several US states – scrapping the sale of new combustion cars in a decade's time, it is crucial that JLR begins to transition the Range Rover brand from large-capacity petrol and diesel engines to EV power.

"The Range Rover Electric will offer performance on a par with that of V8 models"

OFFICIAL PICTURE

SPY SHOT

Range Rover Sport Electric is undergoing shakedown testing

RR Sport: debut in early 2026

To ease that shift, it is targeting performance parity with today's models in key areas. The Range Rover Electric, for example, will offer performance "comparable" to that of existing V8 models, said JLR, which top out with the rapid 626bhp Sport SV.

JLR bosses also say these models will have the same "go-anywhere" capability as the fuel-burners. Key to this is the introduction of a new Intelligent Torque Management system for the dual-motor powertrain, which replaces a conventional ABS-based traction control system. This is claimed to improve traction by reducing the time needed to send torque to a given wheel from around 100 milliseconds to as little as one millisecond.

While testing these systems in the deserts of the United Arab Emirates (where temperatures hit as high as 50deg C, with humidity levels of 90%), product engineering director Thomas Müller said: "Range Rover Electric matches the performance of its ICE equivalents – in some instances even surpassing them – thanks to the introduction of these new features."

JLR has also promised that the EV will surpass

JLR'S NEW EVs: WHAT'S COMING WHEN

Range Rover Electric 2025

Range Rover Sport Electric 2026

Range Rover Velar Electric 2026

AUTOCAR
IMAGE

Discovery Electric 2027

AUTOCAR
IMAGE

Defender 'Sport' Electric 2027

AUTOCAR
IMAGE

Range Rover Evoque Electric 2027

other luxury electric SUVs in terms of towing, wading and all-terrain capability.

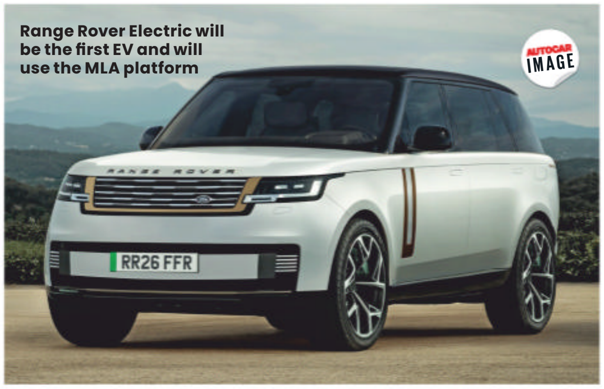
Specific details about the battery are still under wraps but JLR has confirmed the adapted MLA architecture will use an 800V charging system. Given that rivals such as the Lotus Eletre, with a 109kWh battery, are offering 315 miles of WLTP range, the Range Rover Electric will need to be competitive with them.

Arriving last will be the electric Evoque. It will use the same EMA platform as the Velar and, like its sibling, it is expected to be offered first as an EV. Like its bigger range-mates, a move to electric power will be vital to keeping the nameplate on sale beyond 2030.

While little is known about the next-generation car, it is not expected to move away from its current positioning as the entry point to the Range Rover line-up, given its popularity with buyers – especially in the UK, where last year it was JLR's best-seller with 13,000 examples delivered, beating even the Defender.

Like the current car, it is set to be built at Halewood and will serve as a rival to the likes of the BMW X1, Lexus NX, Volvo XC40 and Cupra Terramar. JLR has yet to confirm a scheduled launch date for the next generation of its smallest model, but the current car turns seven this year, which is how old the first Evoque was when it retired.

FELIX PAGE AND WILL RIMELL



Range Rover Electric will be the first EV and will use the MLA platform

THIS IS THE IDEAL OPPORTUNITY TO GIVE THE VELAR A MUCH-NEEDED FRESH START

STEVE CROPLEY

The advent of an all-new Range Rover Velar gives a fundamentally unsuccessful model the brand-new start it deserves.

'Velar' was a badge used on the very first 1960s Range Rover prototypes to protect the model from prying eyes, so its earliest association is with a towering, world-beating success. How fitting if a second production Velar could bury the indifferent achievements of its predecessor.

The prospects look good. We understand the new Velar will have a unique shape and a clearly defined market space, rather than being a gap-plugger like the outgoing car, which was created to "heal over" a space between the Evoque and the Range Rover that rivals were exploiting.

News of a sleek, low-roofed Velar for 2026 hints at sophisticated aerodynamics, which, given the weight reductions also forthcoming from the Velar's new 800V EMA platform, suggest that as well as good looks, this new SUV could also achieve market-leading levels of efficiency.

ASTON PUMPS DBX TO 717BHP TO OUTPUNCH PUROSANGUE

New S is 47kg lighter than the 707 and the most powerful pure-ICE SUV

Aston Martin has launched a faster and lighter flagship S variant of the DBX SUV, cranking the power to 717bhp to make it the most powerful non-electrified SUV on the market.

Although the British company has used the S badge for a range of high-performance specials, starting with the Vanquish S in 2004, this is the first time it has been applied to its best-selling SUV.

Aston Martin CEO Adrian Hallmark claimed the new model serves as "a powerful statement of intent", signalling that lighter, more powerful variants will remain a key part of the firm's future model plan.

The new DBX S will sit above the current 697bhp DBX 707 - since April last year, the only variant offered in the UK. It retains the same 4.0-litre twin-turbocharged V8 but it has been reworked, with larger compressor wheel diameters taken from the Valhalla. Aston Martin has also tuned it to offer more "urgency" at the top end of the rev counter.

While that means the 0-62mph time remains at 3.3sec, Aston claims the 0-124mph acceleration time is cut by 0.3sec.

Meanwhile, a new exhaust system has been fitted to make the V8 louder, the steering ratio is 4% faster and the turning circle has been trimmed by nearly half a metre.

The DBX S's 717bhp output makes it 2bhp more powerful than its Ferrari Purosangue rival – which draws power from a naturally aspirated 6.5-litre V12 – but still leaves it short of rivals that use electrified powertrains, such as the 729bhp Porsche Cayenne Turbo E-Hybrid and 789bhp Lamborghini Urus SE.

The DBX S retains the 707's variable all-wheel drive system and nine-speed wet-clutch automatic gearbox, although Aston Martin says the change-up points for the gearbox have been reworked to account for the wider rev range, and the downshifts in Sport and Sport+ modes are more aggressive.

Aston Martin has also significantly reduced the weight of the DBX S by up to 47kg compared with the 2245kg 707. The slimming measures include a new optional carbonfibre roof, which forgoes roof rails and saves 18kg of mass as well as lowering the centre of gravity. There are also optional 23in magnesium wheels, which are 19kg

> "It's a 'powerful statement of intent' from Aston Martin"

THE MOST POWERFUL ASTONS – SO FAR...

	VALKYRIE	VANQUISH	DBS 770 ULTIMATE	ONE-77	DBX S
Power	1139bhp	824bhp	759bhp	750bhp	717bhp
Engine	6.5-litre V12, plus electric motor	5.2-litre twin-turbo V12	5.2-litre twin-turbo V12	7.3-litre V12	4.0-litre twin-turbo V8
0-62mph	2.6sec	3.3sec	3.4sec	3.7sec	3.3sec
Top speed	220mph	214mph	211mph	220mph	193mph

lighter than the standard aluminium versions, and an optional polycarbonate honeycomb grille.

Beyond the weight-saving features, the DBX S gains a number of styling changes, including a new black grille design inspired by the DBS 770 Ultimate, a new splitter and diffuser, and new side sills that help channel airflow around the side of the car.

At the back, the quad exhausts have been vertically stacked, while the rear bumper has been extensively reworked.

Inside, there is a bespoke S design with a herringbone pattern on the seats and this is extended to the headlining if the carbonfibre roof is selected. Alcantara upholstery is standard, while semi-aniline leather and red seatbelts are optional.

A 14-speaker audio system is standard and a 23-speaker Bowers & Wilkins set-up is also offered.

The DBX S is available to order now and deliveries are set to begin in the final quarter of 2025. Pricing has yet to be confirmed but it will be a step up from the £205,000 DBX 707.

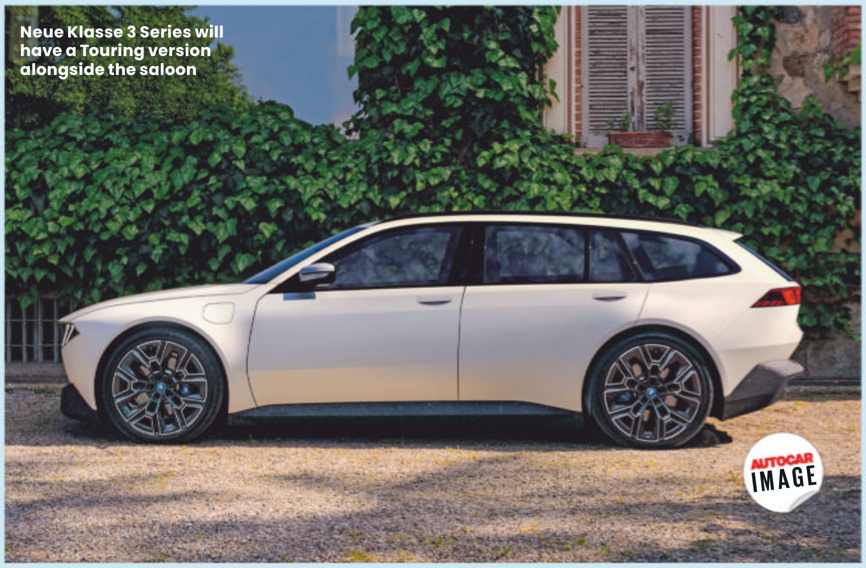
JAMES ATTWOOD

OFFICIAL PICTURES

Leather seats are optional; herringbone pattern is unique to the S

Rear styling has been reworked; tailpipes are now stacked vertically

Optional carbonfibre roof ditches the rails and saves 18kg



Neue Klasse 3 Series will have a Touring version alongside the saloon

TOURING BODY AND i3 NAME DESTINED FOR NEW 3 SERIES

THE ELECTRIC VERSION of the next-generation BMW 3 Series will resurrect the i3 name and be offered in Touring estate form.

Due on sale next year as the second of BMW's Neue Klasse generation of cars, the new 3 Series will be offered with ICE and EV power and it will be completely restyled as it moves to an all-new, EV-first architecture.

Its design and technology have been previewed by a succession of concept cars: i Vision Dee, Neue Klasse and Vision Driving Experience. But these have all been saloons, raising questions about whether the estate-bodied Touring would return.

But now, BMW Group design boss Adrian van Hooydonk has told Autocar that estates remain a highly important part of the brand's market share and reputation, and he strongly hinted that an estate variant will follow soon after the saloon is revealed early next year.

"I think the 'touring' [estate] is making a comeback," he said. "Of course, we've propelled it with the M3 Touring and M5 Touring. They seem to be very popular, even in countries where tourings or estates are traditionally not very. So yes, there is new wind in that segment and we're very happy about that."

Van Hooydonk said estates and saloons are still important to BMW

"First, we will start with an SUV," he added, referring to the new iX3, which will be revealed in September. "Then, pretty soon after, we will come with our new interpretation of a sporty sedan. We believe that segment is not dead.

"SUVs are half of our business. The other half are still sporty, elegant sedans or coupés, and obviously we care about that as well. That's what we're rooted in and we are often seen as the benchmark – and we want it to stay that way."

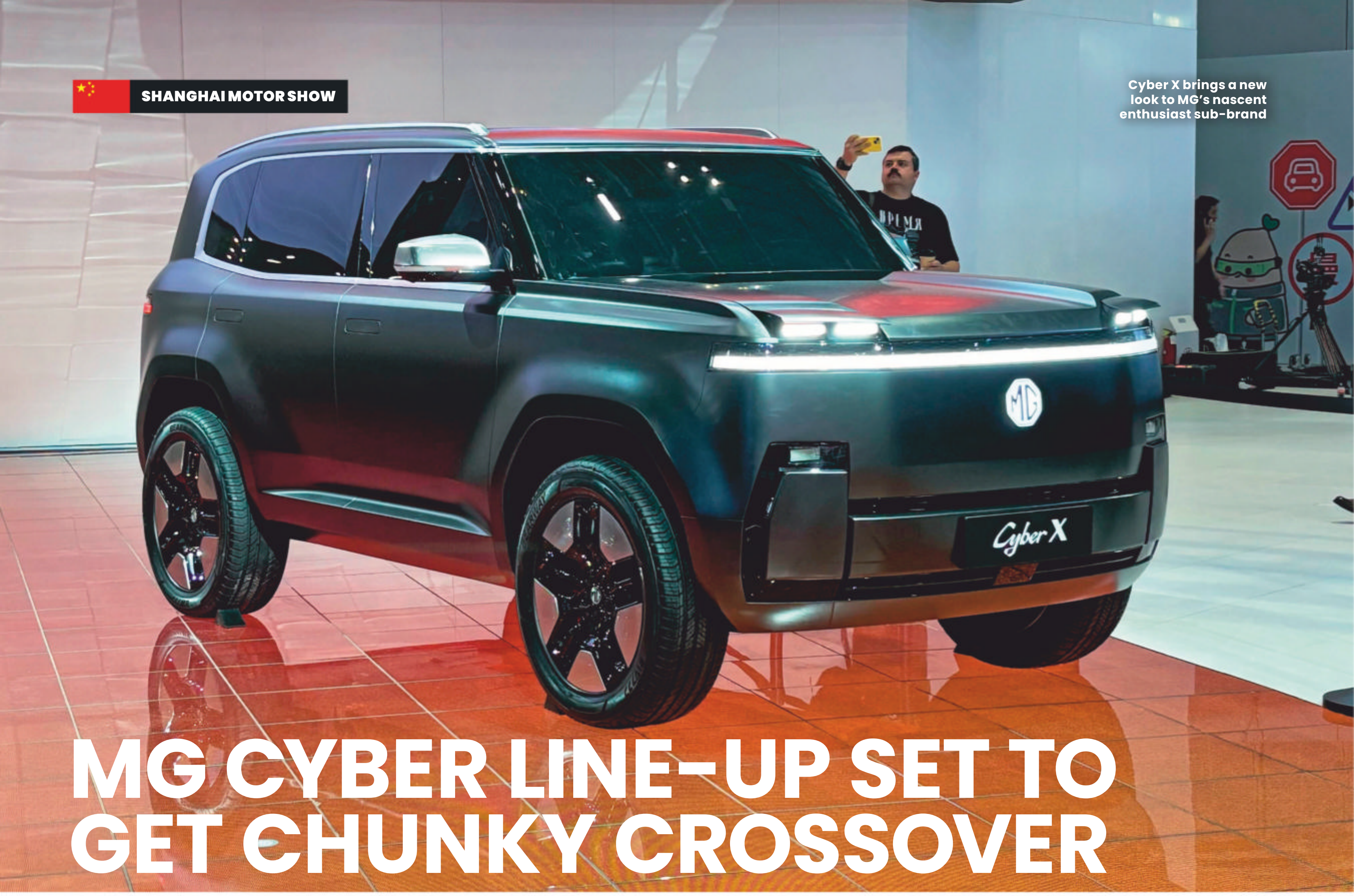
Van Hooydonk's comments about plans for a reborn 3 Series Touring came as BMW product boss Bernd Körber officially confirmed that the company will continue to use the 'i' badge for electric cars. So the 3 Series EV will revive the i3 moniker that has been dormant in Europe since the carbonfibre-bodied hatchback went out of production in 2022. The decision is in keeping with the current iX1, iX2, i4, i5 and i7 naming strategy.

Körber said it is important to have some differentiation in model badging between ICE and EV cars.

"With the choice of drivetrain, you don't make a decision on design, you don't make a decision on digital or ADAS capabilities, but you choose a drivetrain and basically the cars look the same," he said. "That's the core philosophy. So why should we name an EV car differently? That would be against our philosophy."

Körber said this means the upcoming electric 3 Series will be badged i3 – the name also used by the electric version of the current-generation car sold in China.

New 3 Series saloon (pictured) will follow the iX3



Cyber X brings a new look to MG's nascent enthusiast sub-brand

MG CYBER LINE-UP SET TO GET CHUNKY CROSSOVER

Sub-brand's new 4x4-inspired model will join the Cyberster sports car

MG has taken to the Shanghai motor show to reveal a rugged, boxy SUV concept that previews the second model in its fashion-focused Cyber line-up.

The Cyber X is a bold, two-box, 4x4-inspired crossover that measures 4.3m long, which makes it roughly the same size as the Land Rover Defender 90.

It has been revealed in concept form without an interior, but the design boss of MG parent company SAIC, Jozef Kaban, suggested to Autocar that the speed of development of Chinese companies means it could quickly be made production-ready.

One priority of the concept car, said Kaban, is to demonstrate how the more enthusiast-focused Cyber brand could be expanded and bring a new character to the MG family.

Kaban said: "One thing we have been talking about is the passion of MG, and delivering experience which is not just going from A to B but a pleasure which makes you happy."

According to Kaban, MG "connects young and old

Production version of this 4.3m-long concept is on the way

MG CYBERSTER GTS GIVEN GREEN LIGHT

MG has confirmed plans to put the four-seat coupé version of its Cyberster sports car into production.

The fixed-roof Cyberster GTS was revealed as a running prototype at last year's Goodwood Festival of Speed but there has been no indication of a likely launch date - despite suggestions that it could arrive this year.

However, MG confirmed at the Shanghai motor show that a production version is on the way and it could land in time for the 60th anniversary of the original MGB GT in October.

Asked for an update on the Cyberster GTS, the design boss of MG's parent company SAIC, Jozef Kaban – who was responsible for the concept – would only say: "It's coming."

He cited the positive public reaction to last year's concept as a factor in MG giving a production version the green light, saying the exposure "made it happen".

Cyberster GTS may arrive in October for MGB GT's 60th anniversary

LEPAS TO RIVAL DACIA IN UK

Omoda parent company Chery is set to launch its third brand in the UK, called Lepas. Models are tipped to be rebadged Tiggo small SUVs. The Dacia Duster-sized 4 Pro is expected to be the first later this year.

DVSA TACKLES TEST WAIT

The DVSA will add 10,000 more driving tests a month to cut the six-month wait faced by learners across much of Britain. It will also double its capacity for training examiners and reintroduce overtime incentives.

people, rich and un-rich people. Not many brands have the ability to do what MG does.”

Although the Cyber X previews a sibling model to the Cyberster sports car and is likely to share its fundamental underpinnings and technologies, it takes a radically different design approach – as part of Kaban’s plan to give the Cyber line-up as broad an appeal as possible.

“When you see the Cyberster, it’s soft like a circle, with almost no edges – and with the other one coming, it’s almost like plus and minus,” said Kaban. “They are completely different – but plus cannot live without minus. Their contrasts bring people together.”

Kaban said the main priority with the Cyber X’s design was to “give families an emotional car, to give them joy by not needing to compromise at the stage of life when they have a family”.

The production version of the Cyber X will be MG’s third distinct SUV model line in Europe. While it is only slightly smaller than the ZS and electric S5 EV, Kaban said its radically different design and positioning mean it can co-exist with its high-riding range-mates.

“Of course we have HS and ZS and they are going to live but we could give another star next to them to shine, to make the family even stronger,” he said.

The Cyber X’s monolithic silhouette is not a reflection of a desire to rethink traditional SUV designs, added Kaban, but rather a recognition that “being a little bit edgy doesn’t need to hurt”.

He referenced the unusual pop-up headlights – “like a Testarossa” – as a particular design highlight, saying that the advent of the ‘digital world’ means some historic car design differentiators have been lost and the Cyber X concept is designed to explore ways of bringing some of that character back to the brand.

FELIX PAGE

ID Era previews a REx seven-seater developed jointly by VW and SAIC

ID ERA REVEALS VW PLAN TO MAKE RANGE-EXTENDER EVs

VOLKSWAGEN IS PLOTTING to bring range-extender EVs to Europe after previewing its first model with the drivetrain at the Shanghai motor show.

Range-extender EVs, also known as REXs or EREVs, are the latest spin on hybrid cars, in which a combustion engine acts as a generator to power the electric motor or top up the battery, rather than driving the wheels.

Martin Sander, VW’s global head of sales and marketing, told Autocar: “Range-extenders today are already a very big thing in China. They will be of relevance in North America and we are convinced they will also have relevance in Europe.”

At the Shanghai motor show, VW unveiled the ID Era concept, a seven-seat SUV developed jointly with MG parent company SAIC that previews a REx model with a promised combined range of more than 621 miles.

Chinese car makers including Li Auto, Leapmotor and Avatr have swelled the market for REXs in China, prompting global companies to roll out their own REx models.

Sander: “Range-extenders will have relevance in Europe”

“I think range-extenders could be a very good intermediate step for many consumers,” said Sander.

One potential eventuality is that VW will adapt an existing EV platform to incorporate a combustion engine. “We’re looking into the options,” said Sander.

Among the few range-extender models currently on sale in the UK are the Mazda MX-30 R-EV, Leapmotor C10 REEV and LEVC TX taxi.

LEAPMOTOR TEES UP RANGE EXPANSION

CHINESE ELECTRIC CAR maker Leapmotor will expand its global line-up in the next two years with a pair of hatchbacks and a small SUV.

The firm, which is partnered with Stellantis, currently sells the T03 supermini and C10 SUV in Europe and it will add the B10 crossover (driven, p30) by the year’s end.

Not long after that, it will reveal a new Volkswagen Golf-sized hatchback called the B05 and a Renault 4 rival named the A10. That car will then spawn its own low-riding hatchback sibling, which will be called the A05 and could be priced below £20,000. The B01 (right) isn’t expected to be sold in the UK.

B10 will arrive this year; two hatches and a small SUV are set to follow

ALSO STARRING…

AUDI E5 SPORTBACK

First model for China-specific sub-brand AUDI gets a radical look – and no four-ring logo.

DENZA Z

Concept previews a 1000bhp-plus electric Porsche 911 rival.

MAZDA EZ-60

Second Mazda from Changan joint venture is an electric CX-60 alternative.

LEAPMOTOR B01

Fashion-focused Citroën ë-C4 rival is priced from just £10k in China. UK sales unlikely.

XPENG AEROHT

Our first sighting of the six-wheeled “Land Aircraft Carrier”. Yours for £134,000.

ALPINE DELAYS US LAUNCH

Alpine has postponed its US launch due to uncertainties around tariffs. Renault CFO Duncan Minto said: “I don’t think it’s the right time.” Three E-segment cars, due by 2030, were designed with the US in mind.

NEW C5 AIRCROSS GETS EV

The Mk2 Citroën C5 Aircross is here with a radical new look and, for the first time, an EV. The top-rung EV has a 97kWh battery, 422 miles of range and 227bhp. A 135bhp hybrid and 192bhp PHEV are also available.

OFFICIAL PICTURES

FERRARI TAKES 296 TO THE MAX WITH NEW SPECIALE

More power, extra downforce and less weight mark out supercar

New GT3-inspired aero gives 435kg of downforce at 155mph

Time-limited Speciale is available in spider and coupé guises

The new Ferrari 296 Speciale is billed as the “most fun to drive, emotionally charged” car the marque has built yet, and its 868bhp is “very close” to the limit of what a rear-wheel-drive car can offer, its maker claims.

Priced from €407,000 (£349,000) in Italy and offered in coupé and spider forms, it packs 49bhp more than the 296 GTB courtesy of its V6 engine and gearbox-housed electric motor, has 20% more downforce and is 60kg lighter.

However, it is “not just an exercise where we put a few additional horsepower”, said Ferrari commercial chief Enrico Galliera.

The Speciale instead represents a more comprehensive engineering effort. For instance, its twin-turbo V6 uses aluminium pistons and the titanium conrods from the new F80 hypercar, and the head is secured to the block with titanium bolts. This has allowed an increase in combustion chamber pressure of 7%, boosting the V6’s output from the previous 654bhp to 690bhp. Moreover, the crankcase has been shaved down to save 1.2kg and the turbo design has been reworked to shed another 1.2kg.

Ferrari has also doubled the size of the ‘hot tube’ – the sound pipe linking the engine bay and cabin – to improve the sound quality and volume of the V6.

Revised cooling for the hybrid system has unlocked a further 13bhp, independent of the V6.

“We are very, very close to the limit of the maximum horsepower that we can manage for a rear-wheel-drive car,” said development chief Gianmaria Fulgenzi.

WHAT WE SAID ABOUT THE 296 SPECIALE’S PREDECESSORS

2003 360 CHALLENGE STRADALE
“There’s something about the Stradale we haven’t seen in a Ferrari for a long time. Spirit, fire and soul. We’ll take the noise, the water leaks and the shabby cabin build. Because this is the best Ferrari since the F40 and, right now, the most exciting car on the planet.”

2008 430 SCUDERIA
“The 430 Scuderia is a brilliant car that feels every inch as at home on the road as it does on the track. Its engine is a thing of wonder. Its straight-line performance is beyond reproach. Its exquisite, delicate handling is straight from the top drawer.”

2014 458 SPECIALE
“It’s such a pure, uncorrupted driver’s car. Like all great performance cars, it feels over-provisioned for sheer grip and agility, communicates effusively and challenges you to get on its level or find the limit of your own in the process.”

2019 488 PISTA
“The 458 Speciale was less brutal, but the major components of its driving experience seemed more harmoniously balanced. The 488 Pista is faster and more visceral, but it’s different: as though the engine and chassis are in competition for superstar status.”

FERRARI 296 SPECIALE
Price £349,000 (est)
Engine V6, 2992cc, twin-turbocharged, petrol, plus axial-flux motor
Power 868bhp at 8000rpm
Torque tbc
Gearbox 8-spd dual-clutch auto, RWD
Dry weight 1410kg (spider: 1490kg)
0-62mph 2.8sec
Top speed More than 205mph

With that in mind, an aerodynamic overhaul has resulted in a near-complete redesign of the 296's rear end inspired by the Challenge and GT3 racers. This has brought about the fitment of two winglets atop the car's rear haunches and a small active spoiler that rises from the back end. The spoiler has three possible positions and adjusts based on the steering angle and throttle position. It plays a key role in boosting the car's maximum downforce by 20% compared with the 296 GTB, with 435kg at 155mph.

The damper and spring set-up has been revised, bringing a 5mm drop in ride height and a claimed 13% reduction in maximum body lean when cornering.

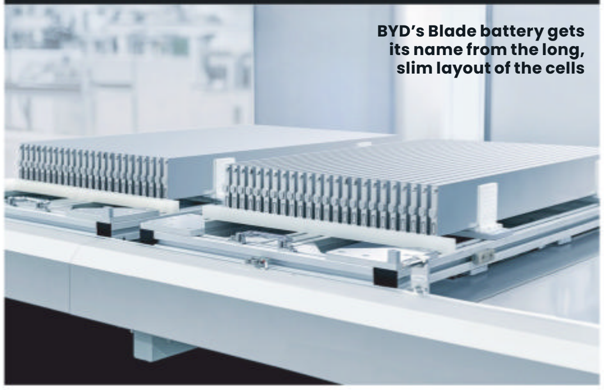
The cockpit has been reworked to minimise weight, with new seats that are said to be 5kg lighter than those in the 296 GTB. There is more carbonfibre than before, including on a new single-piece door card, and the new steering wheel swaps the previous unit's touch-sensitive control pads for traditional buttons.

Ferrari said the Speciale will not be strictly limited in number but by the time it spends in production, which will be significantly shorter than for the now-discontinued GTB. It will be "very exclusive", said Galliera. Ferrari will offer the car only to what it calls "active" clients: those who have bought a new or approved-used car (or maintained an older car) through an official dealer within the past five years.
CHARLIE MARTIN

Steering wheel and seats are new, along with extra carbonfibre

Next big thing

JESSE CROSSE



BYD's Blade battery gets its name from the long, slim layout of the cells

THE BLADE DESIGNED TO CUT RECHARGE TIMES TO SHREDS

EV DRIVETRAINS AND particularly batteries are developing at a remarkable pace compared with the combustion engine. As a result, range has increased but probably even more marked is the desire to bring charging times in line with ICE refuelling.

BYD recently announced its Super e-Platform along with the latest 'flash-charge' version of its lithium-iron-phosphate (LFP) Blade battery, which is promised to get close to ICE refuelling times by recharging in six minutes. The new platform is claimed to support charging at up to 1000kW, which seems incredible given the typical rapid-charge rate was 50kW just a few years ago.

The name Blade describes the unusual design of the battery, where long, slim cells almost a metre in length make up the pack, rather than modules packed full of smaller pouch, cylindrical or prism cells.

In that sense it's unusual, but its LFP chemistry isn't. The advantage of LFP lies in being economical, cobalt- and nickel-free and, above all, safer. LFP battery chemistry is often used in stationary battery systems (including domestic solar systems) and releases heat slowly and doesn't release oxygen if damaged.

BYD has demonstrated that its Blade battery cell passes the nail penetration test without emitting fire or smoke, whereas a cell based on alternative chemistry like NMC (lithium, nickel, manganese, cobalt oxide) subjected to the same test reacts violently.

While the basic chemistry of the LFP battery isn't extraordinary, achieving a charge rate of 10C for the BYD flash-charge battery is. The 'C' rate is the rate at which a battery charges relative to its capacity and illustrates how quickly a battery can accept and discharge energy. A battery charging from 0% to 100% capacity in one hour is charging at 1C but at 10C that would drop to six minutes. For an EV in the real world, that would depend on a charger being able to deliver enough power and other factors such as how effectively the temperature of the battery is managed.

To achieve that, the Super e-Platform has a 1000V architecture that includes not just the battery but also the motor, power supply and air conditioning. Four thousand 1MW (1000kW) chargers are already planned for China so that just leaves the question of how an LFP battery can accept charge more quickly than any other battery tech.

When charging, lithium ions travel from the positive electrode (cathode) to the negative electrode (anode) in each cell. BYD says to achieve the colossal charge rate it "built ultra-fast ion channels, reducing the battery's internal resistance by 50%". The company declined to answer any of our questions about how it's achieving this but generally ion channels can relate to the composition of the electrolyte material, which carries the ions between the electrodes and the separator between the positive and negative electrode, which prevents them touching.

SUBARU PLEDGES TO BRING BACK SPORTY MODELS

Brand's Europe boss says plans are under way to rekindle the STI spirit

Subaru is planning to offer performance models in its future fully electric line-up – which could include new sports cars in the vein of the Impreza STI and BRZ.

The brand gained a huge cult following for its rally-honed performance machines in the early 1990s, and it enjoyed success with the BRZ sports car that was launched in 2012 as a twin to the Toyota GT86.

In recent years the firm has focused its efforts on rugged SUVs, and it has been forced to withdraw all of its performance models from Europe due to emissions regulations.

However, speaking to Autocar, Subaru Europe boss David Dello Stritto said: "There are plans to bring back the sportiness in Subaru."

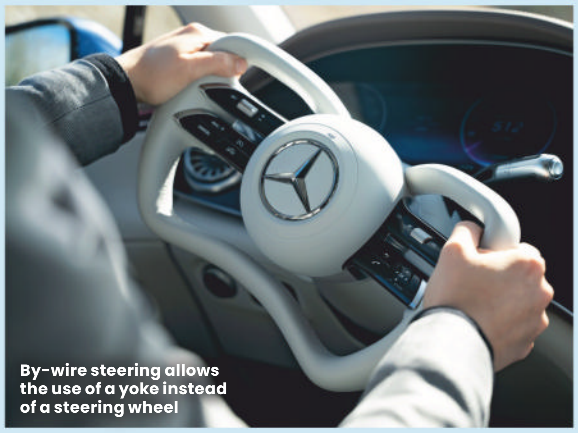
While he declined to elaborate on the specifics, he added: "If you ask me to sum up what Subaru means for customers in Europe right now, it's three letters: SFT - safe, fun and tough. Those values are why our customers in Europe keep coming back to us.

"But there's a fourth pillar I've been missing to sell in Europe for the past 10 years, and that's P, for power and performance. Ask the average person what Subaru means and they'll say STI. You can't disassociate this from Subaru.

"So we need to bring the sportiness back to Subaru.

> **"With an EV you've got the power and performance"**

MERC SET TO TURN A CORNER WITH BY-WIRE STEERING



By-wire steering allows the use of a yoke instead of a steering wheel

MERCEDES-BENZ IS on track to launch its first car equipped with by-wire steering, allowing it to swap the traditional steering wheel for a yoke.

The system, which is expected to be on sale next year, will replace the mechanical connection between the steering and the front wheels with an electronic connection – the 'wire' – that is said to provide a quicker response and greater bandwidth of feedback. The set-up quickens at low speeds to reduce the effort required for manoeuvres such as parking.

For better control, a flat-bottomed yoke is used, similar to that in the recently revised Lexus RZ, which also offers steer-by-wire tech. The design is said to free up knee room, making it easier to get in and out of the car, and give a better view of dashboard display screens.

Mercedes says the new set-up also brings a more natural interaction with the rear-wheel steering set-up available on its flagship models, such as the S-Class and EQS saloons. The latter has been used as a test mule for the system. Given that the EQS is due a facelift within the next year suggests it could be the first to be equipped with the new technology.

Mercedes added that the removal of the physical linkage between the steering wheel and the front end of the car "almost completely" removes the feel yielded by rough road surfaces.

The set-up has been tested on an EQS mule

STI E-RA concept previewed radical sporty EV in 2022

Right now, we couldn't do it: Europe says you can't, because you have a GPF [gasoline particulate filter] that can literally choke your engine."

That issue won't be a problem for electric cars, however. Subaru is already looking at what it can do in the electric performance sphere, having shown off the radical, 1073bhp STI E-RA in 2022.

Dello Stritto explained: "With an EV you've got the power and the performance, and you've got an all-wheel drive system. We're working on sportier models, and electrification allows us to do this.

"Let's face it, it's nice to have that prospect of a future WRX STI – super-fast, gold wheels, blue colour. This is what we want, at the end of the day."

Subaru currently has a partnership with Toyota to jointly develop electric cars: its first EV, the Solterra – which was recently updated – is based on the bZ4X, and the new Trailseeker EV uses the same jointly developed platform.

Subaru is due to start producing its new EVs from 2028 onwards, but the partnership with Toyota is set to continue. That raises the prospect of the two firms sharing a platform for a future sports car, as they did with the BRZ and GT86.

Toyota has showcased a future electric sports car concept of its own in the form of the FT-SE. The Japanese brand is also developing a new 2.0-litre engine that would help hybridised GR sports cars so they can be sold in greater numbers in markets such as Europe where strict emission regulations limit sales.

Asked by Autocar if this relationship could aid the development of a future Subaru performance car, Dello Stritto said "of course, yes", although he declined to comment further on whether that would be with technological development or a full model.

JAMES ATTWOOD

HOT SUBARU EVs? IT MAKES GOOD BUSINESS SENSE

JAMES ATTWOOD

Does Subaru need performance cars to succeed? Its success in the US, by far its largest market and where many buyers have never heard of Colin McRae, would suggest not.

But its US sales lean heavily on rural states with dodgy weather such as Vermont and Washington, where reliable, rugged, affordable all-rounders are a valued commodity.

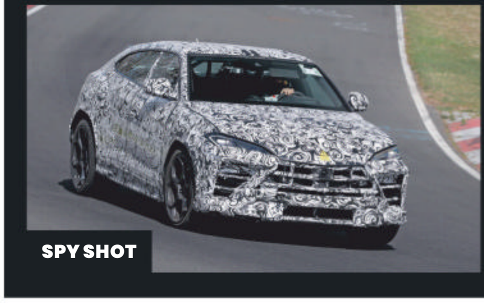
Subaru appeals to similar buyers in the UK but it's a far smaller market. (It sold 2419 cars in the UK last year.) The firm's future EV line-up should be less niche, but to succeed Subaru needs to broaden its appeal. How has it done that in the past? With performance cars.

We're not talking about a WRC comeback, but STI-badged performance variants of its EVs or even a BRZ-style sports car would really help Subaru capture public imagination. Through its partnerships with Toyota, there is a clear route for it to do that. Subaru is always likely to be a niche brand in the UK – but it has a proud heritage from which it can benefit by leaning into.

LAMBO READIES URUS RANGE-TOPPER

A new range-topping Lamborghini Urus Performante is in the works – and it could get a new plug-in hybrid powertrain as part of the SUV's mid-life refresh next year.

Signage on the test mules note that they are packing an electrical element. This is likely to be a boosted version of the Urus SE's 789bhp system that's centred on a 4.0-litre twin-turbo V8. Other changes include new bumpers and aero.



SPY SHOT

Grapevine

MARK TISSHAW

Polestar's Lohscheller: turnaround plan is already bearing fruit

WITH PRODUCTION SITES in China, the US and Korea all exporting between each other and a brand still trying to establish itself with consumers and investors, Polestar would appear to be exposed to tariffs, trade wars and market instability.

But life has gone on for Polestar and CEO Michael Lohscheller, who in the week of the US tariff rollout found time for three runs around Hyde Park. "You can't just complain" about tariffs, he said. Yes, "it would be better to have more planning security", but Polestar still has to do business and "get on with things".

For Lohscheller, when out of his trainers, that means executing his turnaround plan for the company he joined six months ago. More models and more dealers "actively selling" cars in person should drive 30-35% growth every year for the next three years. Production will be localised where possible to avoid tariffs, and he will get production costs down. The goal is to turn a cash burn of around $100 million per month to positive cashflow by 2027.

Polestar is being made into a proper car company under Lohscheller, rather than a trendy brand that happens to make some good cars. It has always been one of the most interesting start-ups of recent times, sired out of Volvo and with Geely backing, yet Polestar was drifting under previous boss Thomas Ingenlath, who had done a good job of getting the brand off the ground but was struggling to move it on to the next level.

Sales growth of 76% year on year for the first quarter of 2025 is an early sign of progress under Lohscheller, perhaps unsurprisingly given its model range has tripled. Yet more to the point for Lohscheller is having more places to buy the brand's cars.

For him, it's simple "back to basics"; the new cars are "providing momentum", then that "change from showing to actively selling" is in turn driving the increase in sales.

Lohscheller is an experienced executive who had prominent roles at the Volkswagen Group and most notably Opel, which he led from 2017 to 2021 as it was rolled first into PSA and then Stellantis.

He was attracted to Polestar not only on the strength of the brand and its products and potential but also "because the brand does the right things" on sustainability (it publishes the industry's most comprehensive and open report on its CO_2 reduction). Lohscheller says the "amazing level of transparency" in this area can lead to customers choosing a Polestar over another marque, particularly for fleet buyers and their own targets.

What of those customers who might be coming over from Tesla to Polestar in light of the 'popularity' of Lohscheller's peer? "We are happy for every customer," he says. "If there's uncertainty or discussion with competitors, we try to use that in a positive way."

> **"Sales growth of 76% for the first quarter is an early sign of progress"**

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HORSE BACKS ITSELF TO GIVE CAR MAKERS EASY HYBRID FIX

Geely-Renault ICE specialist in demand by car firms amid EV slowdown

"Everybody is interested" in working with Horse Powertrain, a company co-created by the Renault Group and Geely with the goal of being the world's number-one combustion engine maker, its boss has told Autocar.

"I would challenge you to think of one name we're not talking to," said Matias Giannini, as manufacturers try to balance the need to invest in electric vehicles with the need to sustain production of internal-combustion cars.

Horse isn't even a year old yet is already a near-€15 billion (£13bn) company, because it includes all of Renault's and Geely's non-electric powertrain operations, supplying the two groups' models with combustion engines around the world.

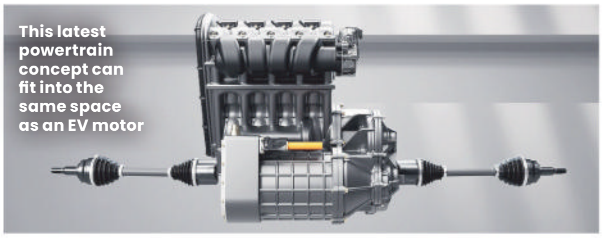
Renault and Geely each have a 45% shareholding in the company, with Saudi Arabian state-owned oil giant Aramco holding the remaining 10%.

Horse has divisions in China and Europe and its existing technology already covers 80% of use cases and global powertrain types and demands around the world, according to Giannini.

Beyond inheriting the Geely and Renault groups' legacy operations, Horse has the goal of partnering other manufacturers to develop and supply them with powertrains, to allow them to focus on the investment in and development of EVs.

Giannini said: "Our proposition can actually help create huge value [for manufacturers].

"In the beginning, there was a little bit of a misconception, a misunderstanding of our purpose. Are we competing [with manufacturers]? Are we here to replace their manufacturing? If they're satisfied with a solution that they have, we don't need to touch that. We're here to understand where they have gaps, where they have problems and how we can help those problems."



This latest powertrain concept can fit into the same space as an EV motor

Giannini said the recent renaissance of hybrid technologies and the realisation that EVs won't be the sole vehicle type in the future "presents a huge problem for car makers" that have switched their investments to focus solely on batteries and motors.

To now invest again in ICE car technology is "not viable" for them, he said.

Horse's key technology demonstrator is a hybrid powertrain that can be retrofitted into vehicle architectures that were conceived solely for electric powertrains.

Showcased at the recent Shanghai motor show, this demonstrator contains a combustion engine, an electric motor, a gearbox and related electronics in a single unit that can be located into the same space as an EV's main drive motor.

"We have to make that conversion" from EVs to this compact hybrid powertrain, believes Giannini.

"That's the only way that manufacturers are going to make money," he said.

"The only reason they don't make money [on EVs] is not because of the price of the battery any more: that has come down. It's because of volume: it's not there to amortise all that investment they're making on those vehicles."

MARK TISSHAW

Q&A MATIAS GIANNINI, CEO, HORSE POWERTRAIN

What is your goal?

"It's fairly simple, actually. Even if we believe in all the numbers that we've seen, the most optimistic is for 50% of the vehicles in 2040 to be battery-electric. What do we do with the other 50%? We came to the game saying 'we have to also continue to improve the other 50%', and that's our mission. That's our goal."

How will you do that?

"We're here to find where manufacturers have a problem and how we can help them solve the problem to accelerate the transition to net zero. That problem could be a manufacturer that doesn't have a hybrid engine; we can offer that to them. It can be that they don't have a presence in a certain region; we can offer that to them."

How can manufacturers most benefit?

"The most beautiful thing about this is when manufacturers think about their next line-up, they don't have to worry about having EV and non-EV. They can focus on only developing battery-electric-vehicle-based architectures, but now [with us] they have a multi-energy solution that they can offer."

DRIVERS 'ANGRY' ABOUT APP-ONLY CAR PARKING

Withdrawal of coin-operated machines leaves apps as the sole option

Another British town has had most of its coin-operated on-street parking machines decommissioned in favour of smartphone payment apps, despite widespread complaints that these are expensive and unreliable.

In the past month, two-thirds of the parking machines in Guildford town centre have been disabled and had notices taped to them advising motorists to pay using the RingGo app.

Surrey County Council said the decision was due to ageing machines, adding: "It costs more to collect cash and maintain many of the machines than they collect in income."

However, not all motorists are happy. Autocar spoke to one driver as she struggled to use one of the new machines in the town. "My phone can't establish a connection [to the RingGo app]," she said. "I'm already late for an appointment and don't have time to waste trying to buy a ticket. I expect I shall be fined."

Later at the same machine, an elderly couple were also unhappy about the change. "We don't like downloading and using apps and would much rather use coins or contactless payment," they said. "At least we have a smartphone. Many of our friends don't. We will have to find another parking space."

Surrey County Council has shut down many of its coin-based machines
MACHINE NOT
IN USE
marston holdings
SURREY
RingGO PAYMENTS ONLY
AT THIS LOCATION
SEE SIDE OF MACHINE
FOR DETAILS

In response, Surrey County Council said the connection issues were "isolated" and "motorists who would like to pay with coins are able to park in alternative locations".

In contrast, Brighton and Hove City Council is considering whether to recommission the 12 contactless payment machines it had switched off in its city centre last year.

It recently concluded a three-month trial of the recommissioned machines, and feedback from drivers has indicated that they are more popular than paying by apps.

Speaking to BBC Radio Sussex, Joyce Collins, 90, said: "I don't know anything about apps. I don't take my car into the city especially because I don't know about the parking."

Another local resident, Christina Westwell, said: "If we have to use an app, we just drive off. I don't want to have to go online."

A spokesperson for the AA said parking apps are not popular with many of its members, adding: "They prefer to pay using chip and pin and get angry with parking apps that won't connect or carry extra charges. Councils make it difficult to pay then make it more expensive to pay. It's a real mess."

In 2023, RingGo generated a record £30 million in parking fees. The money came from the fees it charges councils for managing payments.

The company is one of many app-based parking firms that also include JustPark and PayByPhone.

In an effort to simplify cashless parking, the Department for Transport (DfT) recently created the National Parking Platform. Currently still being trialled, it unites five apps under one system and today handles almost 500,000 parking transactions per month in 473 UK locations.

Replying to criticisms of parking apps, the DfT said: "The government inherited an extremely challenging financial picture, but we are fixing the foundations, which includes making decisions about how to deliver projects where the gap between promised schemes and the money available has become clear."

JOHN EVANS

Some drivers simply won't park where app payment is required

LOTUS COMMENCES MAJOR COST-CUTTING PUSH

EVs like Eletre have boosted sales but profits are down

LOTUS HAS WARNED that heavy cost cutting is on the way as it battles "global trade uncertainties".

The news comes despite the brand nearly doubling its sales over the past year from 6970 to 12,134.

However, between June 2024 and April 2025, it also recorded just $29 million (£21.7m) in gross profit, down from $102m (£76.3m) in the preceding financial year. As a result, its gross profit margin was just 3%.

Chief financial officer Daxue Wang blamed worldwide tariffs and further uncertainties. He also said this would lead to "strategic cost optimisation to improve profitability", especially as owner Geely merges Lotus's operations back into a single company.

"As we progress with the acquisition of Lotus UK, we are committed to driving cost streamlining and operational enhancements across all markets to continuously deliver long-term value," said Wang.

The first evidence of this cost-saving push was seen earlier this month, as Lotus announced plans to cut 270 jobs at its Hethel factory.

GETTY IMAGES

MY WEEK IN CARS

Steve Cropley

ALPINE
HN21 OTU

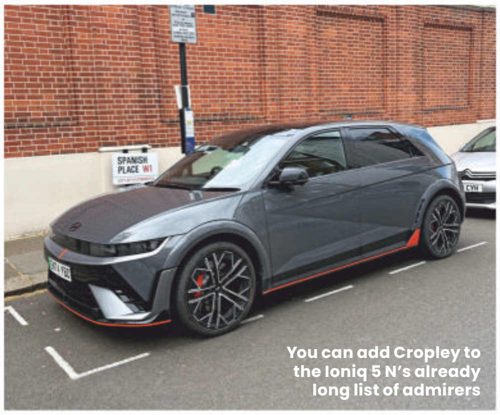
Lithe little Alpine is a joy on road and – here at Castle Combe – on track

MONDAY

Ever since two people whose judgement I trust, Matt Prior and Jonathan Palmer, decided the Hyundai Ioniq 5 N was A Good Thing, I've been desperate to drive one – and it happened this week. A handsome example has just departed our place after an action-packed few days and I'm feeling the loss.

This, you will recall, is a 2.2-tonne electric crossover that can transform itself into a high-performing hot hatch if you take a firm grip. It will accompany your progress with a faux-ICE soundtrack so convincing that at times you can simply forget you're in an EV. Sceptics (I was one) need convincing about such play-acting, but the system's noises and actions are so faithful to your inputs that you need skill to make it work well.

The Steering Committee, as so often, posed the key question ("would you want one?"), and I suppose I would have to answer in the negative. But it would be the car's cost (£65k), size (4.7m long) and consumptions (brakes, tyres and energy) that would stop me.



You can add Cropley to the Ioniq 5 N's already long list of admirers

> “It strikes me as a minor miracle Clarkson is still doing this”

Find me an EV the size and shape of a Ford Escort Twin Cam with matching soundtrack and I'll be hooked.

TUESDAY

With our Alpine A110, my son Jon and I set off to Castle Combe circuit, near Chippenham, for the annual Guild of Motoring Writers' track day, a friendly affair that provides a decent test for your car without getting too serious.

Having owned this car for three years and campaigned it here and there, we're getting to know its limits quite well, so we were able to match the field – even Porsches, of which there were several. The car was on track for two hours solid but once again showed no ill effects, which I read as a big benefit of light weight.

I'm a serial car swapper but keep labelling this Alpine a keeper. However, it's also 'just' a base model with 249bhp and I keep seeing others of our car's vintage and value with 288bhp – 16% more poke. This was starting to look like a danger sign until a wise friend pointed out that the two early versions have exactly the same peak torque: 236lb ft, derived at just 2000rpm. No wonder they get out of corners so well.

THURSDAY

Every week or two, I think I might be in the market for a used Tesla. I've never connected this desire to the machinations of Elon Musk and am always surprised when others do: there's so much more to building a million cars a year than one weird bloke's personality and politics. Anyway, low-mile Model 3s (my favourite) are such superb value that I can't forget it. There's a Hampshire specialist I follow called R Symons, and I'm having trouble not typing that name into every search bar I see. Getting over it, but it's not easy.

SUNDAY

Nose in The Sunday Times over breakfast, I came across Jeremy Clarkson's review of the Ford Mustang Dark Horse. He assessed it with typical off-the-wall brilliance and gave it four stars. It's always a good ST week when JC does the test. What usually stands out, and did this time, is the joy he derives from writing his stuff. A professional cynic, he would never admit to anything resembling joy, but you can feel it.

It always strikes me as a minor miracle that Clarkson is still doing this, given everything that competes for his time (farm, pub, TV, brewery, health, being a celeb). It all goes to prove what Peter Robinson taught me half a century ago: that compared with reading and writing about cars, nothing else is remotely as important or as much fun.

AND ANOTHER THING

Do you have a thing about interesting cars nearby that are apparently unloved? I do. This Mk5 Ford Mustang is in a nearby village and I keep thinking it deserves a better life. My pipe dream: swap it with the owner for a healthy Hyundai i10, then find some restorer to give it a new future. All, of course, after I've won the lottery…

GET IN TOUCH
steve.cropley@haymarket.com

PRIOR CONVICTION

Matt Prior

This week, the screen I will mostly be looking at is the one pictured below, after a hire car lottery ran out of Kia Picantos and provided me with a Volvo XC60. I'm not unhappy about this.

The XC60 is a comfortable car and this is mostly a comfortable screen to look at. It's easy to be critical and plenty (including me) have been of the direction Volvo has taken with its interior functionality lately, with mass migration of controls to a touchscreen – including essentials like the foglight switches – at the expense of separate-button usability.

Speculation, of course, but this may be one of the reasons the pragmatic Håkan Samuelsson was restored as interim CEO. He's a steady hand who understands that cars are not smartphones.

The XC60 has been around since 2017, and while its digital instrument cluster has been updated in that time, there's still a lot to like about the simplicity of its graphics and fonts. It doesn't overburden a driver with information; I could turn off the map if I wanted.

And I should also find myself pleased about the fact that it retains two dials, one for the speedo and one for the rev counter, because the genius of a dial is just how much it tells you in such short order. At a glance, you can see a facet's upper and lower limits, with a needle that shows how far along that range you are, the direction of travel and the rate of change.

Numbers alone can't do this: they can only tell you where you are right now. There's a reason that when film directors want to show an aeroplane in distress, they show a needle spinning anticlockwise very rapidly. We all know what it means.

Bugatti's latest is named after part of a watch, and it's clear why...

That should make this Volvo's dials preferable to use than the numerical script for the speed. Should but, I'm finding, doesn't. With dials nestling perhaps too discreetly around the edge of the screen and with a bold numerical font front and centre showing the speed right next to a graphic that apes roadside speed limit signs (usually but far from always, of course, getting the limit correct), I find myself looking at the numbers more frequently instead.

This is down to the size of the digits, but so glacial is the normal rate of change in daily driving anyway that going by the numbers isn't too much of a drag. And with a mildly hybridised engine, an automatic gearbox, busy traffic and New York state's typical upper speed limit of 55mph, it's not like I'm paying the slightest bit of attention to the rev counter either.

Were the rotary dial bigger and the supposed speed limit a small red telltale needle, I think the display would be more useful. As I find myself nearing a speed limit from above or below, it would be better to have a needle showing how quickly I'm closing in on it, but the instrument has been relegated to minor or cancelled status.

> **"Is there a limit to how good a digital display can look?"**

And this is the case all over the car business. Of the new cars I've tested recently, only in a Caterham Seven and a Morgan Supersport have I been overtly aware of a speedo needle spinning around a dial – and the Morgan had a supplementary digital numeric display too. Even in Porsches and Ferraris, where you would expect the needle to move quickly, you find numbers for the speed, alongside, thankfully still, dials for the revs.

I think there's an inevitability about this. Two large numerals take up less space than even a small dial, and it's not like one can do away with a digital screen entirely, because modern legislation requires that the driver is presented with ample – often too much – information.

But is there a limit to how good a digital display can look? That in my XC60 is of high resolution, and even if the fonts do date, they will do so with Scandi-cool vibes. It's hard to imagine a display looking much more luxurious. I don't remember the dials in the Rolls-Royce Spectre or Bentley Bentayga looking much better, and I'm not sure that should be the case.

There is talk, then, that analogue dials – such as the speedo that features in the new Bugatti Tourbillon – will become a mark of luxury, in the way that, while the digital or smart watch has in most practical terms replaced the analogue one, the posh watches still have hands.

If it does, I'm for it, because well-presented dials aren't just for show: they also tell you something that two digits can't.

GET IN TOUCH
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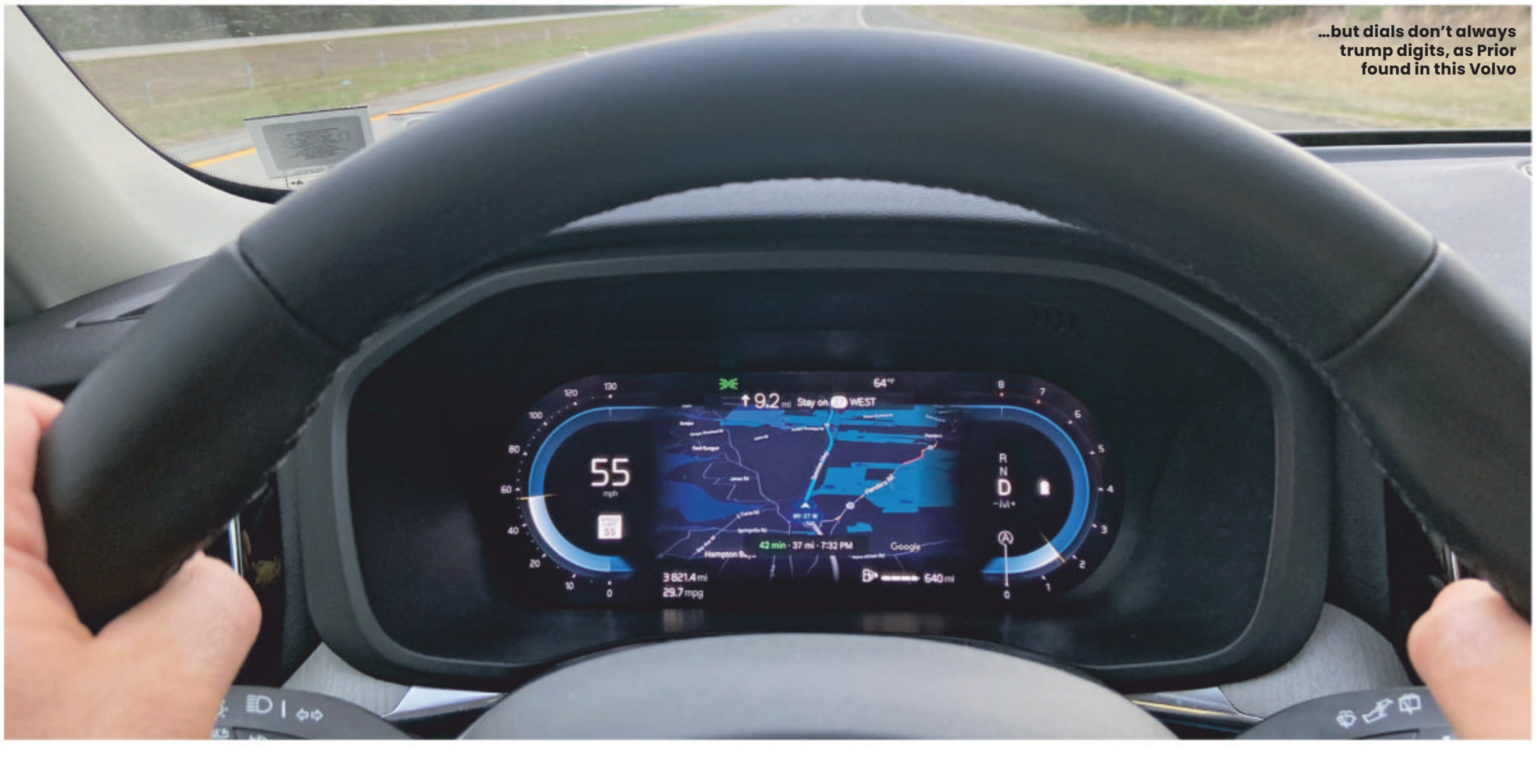

...but dials don't always trump digits, as Prior found in this Volvo

RACING LINES

Damien Smith

Verstappen refused to concede the first corner in Jeddah – or that he was in the wrong

Three wins from the opening five races have catapulted Oscar Piastri to the top of the Formula 1 standings. Now the onus is on his McLaren team-mate Lando Norris to respond as the circus returns to Miami, scene of his 2024 breakthrough. That emphatic victory in the wet Australian opener suddenly seems an awful long time ago.

At just 24 and in only his third F1 season, Piastri's emergence as a clear and obvious title contender is the standout aspect of 2025 so far (at least on track). It's tempting to draw out his nationalistic character traits: he has the cold, even temperament of an Aussie opener in an Ashes Test match. He doesn't get too overwrought when races go wrong and holds his excitement in check when he wins. That equilibrium will stand him in good stead as the stakes rise in the months to come.

A TASTE OF HIS OWN MEDICINE

Wheel to wheel, Piastri is also a match for Max Verstappen's combative aggression. At the Saudi Arabian GP, he faced a short run from the start down to the fiddly chicane but had the inside-line advantage from his grid slot beside pole-sitter Verstappen. A perfect launch gave Piastri the corner, whatever Red Bull team chief Christian Horner tried to claim, to the letter of F1's nanny 'rules for racing' code. He simply took the racing line, forcing Verstappen to make a call: back out or cut the corner. Naturally the four-time champion took the latter option, rejoined in the lead and refused to countenance ceding the position to avoid the inevitable penalty.

At least it was five instead of 10 seconds, because the corner cut had occurred from the start. But the penalty effectively secured Piastri the win. Had Verstappen acted out of character and given up the place, he probably would have lost anyway. As it was, he finished just 2.8sec behind Piastri after yet another brilliant drive, a few weeks after his sensational against-the-rub pole and victory in Japan.

> **"He has the coldness of an Aussie opener in an Ashes Test match"**

On the face of it, the Dutchman's title defence shouldn't be written off just yet – although it's clear that without a dramatic change in form, McLaren's duo will take some beating.

F1'S RORY McILROY

How Piastri sliced past Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton offline through the Jeddah circuit's 21st and 22nd turns following his pit stop also stood out, especially in contrast to how Norris had laboured to overtake the seven-time champion. On two consecutive laps, Hamilton suckered Norris into passing him into the final turn, only to then use the DRS tow to slingshot back past into turn one – a familiar trick at this track. Only at the third time of asking did Norris wait, then nail the Ferrari easily into the first turn. He looked naive.

Error-prone Norris had dropped his McLaren in qualifying so started only 10th when he should have been on the front row. His recovery to fourth was decent, but Charles Leclerc's excellence in the other Ferrari kept him from the podium.

SAUDI ARABIAN GRAND PRIX
2025

Piastri has replaced Norris as McLaren's leading man

As such, Norris now lies 10 points behind his team-mate in the standings. It's early days in a long season, of course. He still has everything in his armoury to beat Piastri, Verstappen and the rest to become world champion. But much like Rory McIlroy and his rocky path to dramatic grand-slam glory in golf's Masters, Norris seems intent on putting his fans through the emotional wringer. The chalk-and-cheese contrast between the McLaren duo, each of whom now has five career wins, will be a fascinating thread in the F1 narrative across the rest of 2025.

STORM CLOUDS GATHER

Beyond the upbeat sporting aspect, F1 faces heavy troubles (although what's new about that?).

Concerns about the new power unit regulations set for introduction next year rumble with increasing force. Is the enhanced reliance on electric propulsion really best for F1? Will energy management become the dominant factor, to the detriment of the racing spectacle? And what happens if (when) one manufacturer nails the new regs and others miss the mark? Fears that F1 could be thrown into crisis mode in 2026 are all too real.

Then there's the continuing exasperation over the FIA's governance. Whether he was right or wrong, Verstappen should have felt free to express his anger at his penalty in Jeddah, yet F1's most outspoken character pulled his punches in fear of the consequences.

Then there's the latest high-profile FIA exit. Robert Reid, former rally co-driver to the late Richard Burns, was admirably forthright on why he resigned as the FIA's deputy president for sport. Once a key ally of president Mohammed Ben Sulayem, Reid spoke of "a fundamental breakdown in governance standards" at the top of world motorsport. Confidence in the FIA hasn't plumbed such depths since the last days of Max Mosley's reign. Can this brass-necked president really remain in office?

GETTY IMAGES

YOUR VIEWS

WRITE TO autocar@haymarket.com

Letter of the week

MY OWN '90s HERO

I very much enjoyed your 'best 1990s heroes' segment (9 April), but I've got to say that I think you missed one very significant vehicle: the Subaru Impreza Turbo 2000.

In 1995, I was running a Fiat Tipo 2.0 16v, a fairly decent hot hatch. Then someone pulled out of a side road in front of me and it got written off, so I needed a new car quickly. I knew about the Impreza, as I followed rallying at the time and I'd been reading about the road version in magazines. It almost seemed too good to be true, offering four-wheel drive and 50bhp extra over most hot hatches for not much more money. So, largely based on positive reviews, I took out a contract hire on an Impreza Turbo 2000 five-door, 100% sight unseen.

It was delivered to my office, and the first words from the delivery driver were: 'Blimey, that's a bit fast!' And he was right. It was on a totally different level to the Tipo. It was mind-blowing. It had power, it had traction; even in the wet, it would simply launch itself at the horizon. And it sounded amazing with that flat-four burble. I had to smile whenever I drove it, the hatch made it incredibly versatile and it would seriously embarrass some very expensive metal over any winding road, especially in the wet, even with the back seats flat and loaded with whatever. It was a miracle that I kept my licence.

I loved it so much that when the contract ended I bought it and then immediately ordered another five-door, having to wait nine months for delivery because by then it was so popular. In a few short years, it went from unknown to becoming a rallying icon. It also became a driver's icon, a ram-raider's icon and eventually a backwards-baseball-cap-wearer's icon.

I did 10 years and 100,000 miles in that second car before I traded it for a Subaru Forester XT – similar performance but a bit more discreet (or grown-up, as my wife put it) – and part of me still misses it.

David Priddy, Datchet, Berkshire

ROUND LOGIC

I used to ride a Kawasaki W800, best described, perhaps, as a Japanese take on the classic British twin, Bonneville, BSA etc (without the oil leaks). It was a wonderful bike for a Sunday morning spin, but one thing I never understood was why Kawasaki had fitted this piece of Japanese engineering with wobbly Dunlop TT tyres.

It got me thinking about the old saying in the culinary world that 'what grows together goes together', meaning that a dish from, say, Tuscany is typically well served with a wine from the same region, since they are created by the same culture, land and tradition.

In the end, I got Bridgestones for my W800 – great tyres that looked perfect on the bike, and just the knowledge that my Japanese bike had Japanese tyres was actually quite satisfying.

This year I needed new rubber for my Volkswagen California, and that same thought came back to me. I got a quote for a set of Michelins but instantly felt uncomfortable with the idea. Why French tyres on a German car? Would you put Goodyears on an Alfa Romeo? I don't think so. Pirellis on a Kia? Hankooks on a BMW? I realised that a set of Continentals was actually the only thing that made sense, and they looked and drove great.

I can't work out if this is just tinfoil-hat logic applied to aesthetics (me being an architect doesn't help) or if there is actually some sense in all this? VW and Conti, in this case, are created and designed by people from the same universities, for the same roads, with similar ideas on automotive engineering. Why get something else? Or is the whole idea just, well, stupid?

Still, most mainstream tyres are 'good enough' nowadays, so just getting the best score sheet isn't much of a guidance.

Per Bornstein
Gothenburg, Sweden

THREE LITTLE PUGS

Memories came flooding back as I read your articles pinpointing the cars that made the 1990s unique.

I was fortunate to own three of these beauties: a Peugeot 106 Rallye and two Peugeot 106 GTis. The Rallye was acquired for the sum of £7500 when the UK list price was £9250 in the days when importing a car saved you money.

Sidegate Motors of Great Yarmouth imported six of them in Bianca White; I purchased one and I understand the rest were sold within a month.

John Dyble
Via email

TVR Griffith deserves to be on any '90s highlights reel, reckons John

This 106 Rallye is a hot hatch that's fondly remembered

Puma ST's new-shape wheel feels familiar to Richard

BRITAIN'S OWN F355

I'm amazed that you could produce a 1990s special and not include the TVR Griffith. When it was introduced, it created a lot of media attention, including from Autocar. It was beautiful too, and displayed in the Design Centre in London. That can't be said of the other '90s cars. It also had a V8 engine so sounded fantastic and was fast.

I'm sure it adorned as many bedroom walls as Ferraris or Lamborghinis, but it was more affordable and made in Britain.

John Hancock
Via email

LOST BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

How could you miss the CE14-generation Ford Escort in your list of 1990s duds (Lost in the archive, 9 April)? Your 29 August 1990 cover line, 'Ford's new Escort meets its rivals… and loses', says it all.

Peter Robinson
Glebe, Australia

At the end of 1990, we called the Escort the year's "most disappointing" car but the Lada Samara the "best forgotten". I know which I'd rather have – KC

CORNERING THE MARKET

Fifty-three years ago, I got an Austin Allegro with the latest 'quartic' steering wheel. The salesman raved about it but the press, public and even friends all ridiculed it, saying things like: "Can't British Leyland even make a round steering wheel?" The car never let me down and I enjoyed the square wheel.

The other day I took delivery of an excellent new Ford Puma ST with the latest square steering wheel. Thing is, I've not heard or seen one negative comment – in fact, quite the opposite!

Richard Wright
Via email

PUTTS ME RIGHT OFF

I read with some interest your road test of the Audi S E-tron GT (2 April). Four stars, great performance and handling, all in comfortable surroundings: what's not to like?

But tucked away, not hidden, is the real killer: price as tested £134,000, value after three years of average use £37,000. That's nigh-on £100,000 of cost for 36,000 miles – a staggering £3 per mile. Add, say, another £1 per mile for the rest and each comfortable mile costs £4.

Happily retired, I drive 300 miles a week to play golf at the magnificent Royal Porthcawl. Cost in the Audi? It would be £1200 per week, say, with a few weeks off – or £50,000 per year. Off my handicap, that equates to £5 per shot. That makes a three-putt very expensive!

Robert Ellis
Usk, Monmouthshire

FALSE ECONOMY

In your Range Rover P550e road test (9 April), you quoted its economy as 9.3mpg track, 26.6mpg touring, 27.1mpg everyday and 29.9mpg average. Now, I last studied statistics 50 years ago, but I do remember that an average will be greater than the lowest figure and lower than the highest figure. So how is the average here 3mpg better than the highest achieved?

Steve Butterworth
Via email

For plug-in hybrid cars, we take the touring and everyday efficiency figures in 'battery hold' mode, with a depleted battery or whatever else we need to do to get the powertrain to operate with little to no electric assistance, so we can get a repeatable read on engine economy (and, let's face it, for the benefit of owners who will never charge the battery). The average is then a straight average of the entire test, including electric-only running, which often results in a higher figure – RL

Weekly winner

Letter of the week wins this ValetPro exterior protection and maintenance kit worth £48

DRAGON'S BREATH
CERAMIC SHAMPOO
GLASS CLEANER
Valet PRO

GREAT REASONS TO BUY

Next week's issue

ON SALE 7 MAY

USED SPECIAL

DREAM CARS FOR THE SUMMER

We pick 37 cars that are so hot they're cool, from Fiat 124 Spider to Porsche Boxster to Subaru Outback and everything in between

ROAD TEST

MERCEDES-BENZ EQS 450+

Is this luxury EV saloon the ultimate limo? Our road testers reveal all

FEATURE

WHY THE AUDI A2 IS STILL SO GOOD, 25 YEARS ON

Matt Prior puts his money where his mouth is and buys one. Why?

EVERY WEEK

USED GUIDE

TOYOTA GT86

This all-time handling hero can be yours for £7500. We explain how to buy wisely

LIVING WITH A...

VOLKSWAGEN TIGUAN

Sensible shoes in SUV form, but was it a daily asset or just dull? Our final report has the answer

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FIRST DRIVES

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HOW WE TEST CARS

Autocar delivers several kinds of reviews on new cars, with different levels of technical and functional scrutiny. As the name suggests, our First Drives section typically addresses cars that we're driving for the first time - either in final production form or as late prototypes. Time in the car can be limited here, technical and equipment specification might not be finalised and some systems software may not be to production spec. For those reasons, First Drive reports don't have star ratings.

Once we have driven a car for a second time in the UK, in right-hand-drive form and typically at greater length, we will rate it, either as part of a shorter UK test report or as the subject of a full, instrumented Road Test.

In the latter case, we take empirical performance and refinement benchmarks from it at Horiba MIRA proving ground, as well as subjective limit handling impressions, plus key measurements of practicality, efficiency and kerb weight.

All UK tests and Road Tests receive proper verdicts with star ratings informed by everything we have learned and the combined impressions and experience of several testers.

TESTED 22.4.25, OXFORDSHIRE **DELIVERIES** MAY

TESLA MODEL Y

Fresh look, new features for world's best-selling car

Shall we talk about you-know-who? Actually, let's not. Whatever you think of the company's figurehead, the Tesla Model Y is an influential car that has topped a number of best-seller lists over the past few years. When such a significant car gets a major update, we're curious what it's like, and we assume you are too.

The Model Y has been around since 2020 (or 2021 in Europe). It getting facelifted after five years could almost make you believe that Tesla is a normal car company. The car has had various updates to its battery and specification in smaller model-year updates, but this is one that you can actually see.

The headline news of the Model Y 'Juniper' is the styling changes and some comfort upgrades.

At the front, there's a Cybertruck-esque light bar, with the headlights moving to separate units beneath, while at the rear the quite rounded tailgate has become more angular. There's a new light bar (unusually using indirect light) and a slightly more pronounced lip spoiler, which apparently produces some more downforce to keep the car planted despite the softer suspension.

That's the other headline change: in response to criticism from anyone who has ever driven a Model Y, the suspension has been made more compliant, the steering has been made less hyperactive and there's now better noise insulation with acoustic glass.

There are no notable powertrain changes, although Tesla does claim to have made the car slightly more efficient by way of improved aero.

There are still two batteries: a 63kWh LFP pack and an 83kWh NMC one. The Standard Range car comes exclusively with a single

Rear space is abundant and passengers now get their own control screen

TESTER'S NOTE
Unlike the Model 3, the Model Y retains an indicator stalk (most likely because Euro NCAP will start to penalise cars that don't, rather than Tesla seeing the error of its ways). It does the indicators only and features no detents. **IV**

"It still feels fundamentally Tesla-like to drive but is better in every way"

Steering is slower, ride more settled, braking more progressive now

279bhp rear motor; the Long Range car uses either a 308bhp rear motor or dual motors producing 375bhp.

Annoyingly, Tesla won't quote power figures or battery sizes, so these are the generally accepted figures rather than official ones.

While most car makers are on a mission to strip complexity out of their interiors, Tesla is slowly adding extra stuff in. Don't get your hopes up: it's still minimalist to the extreme, with essentially no buttons. But the materials have been upgraded, the centre console has gained some flexibility and ambient lighting has appeared.

The huge central touchscreen is mostly familiar. As all-digital interfaces go, it doesn't get much better: it's extremely clear, logical and responsive. The lack of Apple CarPlay and Android Auto is annoying, but there's integration for a bunch of third-party services, so it's not the problem that it could be.

Rear passengers no longer need to ask the front occupants to turn on their heated seats. Instead they now get a small touchscreen to do it themselves. They can also use it to recline their backrests electrically.

Unchanged is the enormous amount of space available. There's good rear leg room, a silly amount of cabin storage, a massive boot with generous underfloor space and a usable frunk.

The Model Y still feels fundamentally Tesla-like to drive, but it's better in every way to the early car I drove in 2021.

One lesser-reported change is the addition of a brake-by-wire system, which means Tesla has finally added a brake pedal that blends regenerative and friction braking. As a result, instead of just a single aggressive regen setting, there's now also a gentler one, with the pedal controlling the rest of the regen. Both options are nice and progressive.

The Model Y is still on the firmer, noisier end of the spectrum, but you don't drive it and think 'cor, this is annoying' any more, because the suspension is well controlled and rounds off sharp edges fairly nicely.

Despite having been slowed down a tad, the steering remains darty off-centre but with rather remote feel. There's plenty of grip and a bit of rear bias to the power delivery, so you can easily make progress on a twisty road. You just wouldn't do so for the fun of it.

Which is fine, because for all the hype and love/hate culture around Tesla, the Model Y is really a car that you buy with your head. It's brilliant at the sensible stuff: as already mentioned, it's ultra-practical and, despite all the advances of other manufacturers, Tesla is still ahead when it comes to EV tech.

My car averaged efficiency of 3.8mpkWh during a mixed day of driving. Okay, conditions were ideal, but that's still impressive and makes for about 300 real-world miles – considerably more than you would get from a Hyundai Ioniq 5.

Save for a paint colour and some bigger wheels, all Teslas come fully loaded, so while the Model Y looks expensive compared with the base versions of rival EVs, there's little in it compared with high-spec alternatives, and the monthly rates are looking quite attractive too.

The outgoing Model Y was still quite recommendable for its space, range, efficiency and performance. This new one is the same but adds a host of useful new features, improves the drivability and takes the edge off the ride. Hard to argue with.

ILLYA VERPRAET

TECH SPEC

TESLA MODEL Y LONG RANGE AWD

Still cavernous, efficient and quick. Now at least 30% less annoying

Price £51,990
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor (front), asynchronous motor (rear)
Power 375bhp
Torque 364lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, 4WD
Kerb weight 1997kg
0-62mph 4.8sec
Top speed 125mph
Battery 83/78kWh (total/usable, est)
Range, economy 364 miles, 4.1mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Hyundai Ioniq 5, Skoda Enyaq

TESTED 24.4.25, LADOUX PROVING GROUND, FRANCE **DELIVERIES** SPRING 2026

ALPINE A390

Electric crossover is supposed to be an A110 for five. That's a tough ask

Alpine, in its 21st-century incarnation at least, is still a young brand, but it's quickly growing up. The first step in the masterplan was to make us all take notice with a sports car: the brilliant A110. Then it came up with something more attainable: the A290 hot hatchback. Now it needs a car for all the family to enjoy. That'll be the new A390.

Because it's 2025, that means it's electric, and because the batteries need to go in the floor, it's crossover-shaped. But stick with us, because this isn't one of those slightly limp Esprit Alpine versions of a Renault: it's a completely stand-alone Alpine model with a special trick up its sleeve – or rather three of them.

Like the Tesla Model S Plaid and Maserati Granturismo Folgore, the A390 has three motors – one at the front, two at the back. That lets it do proper torque vectoring: rather than just brake an inside wheel to encourage the car to turn in, it can overspeed the outside rear. This is electric performance cars coming of age and trying stuff that has no analogue in combustion-engined cars.

Deep down, the A390 is related to the Renault Scenic E-Tech, but it isn't just a Scenic with a sloping roof. Even through the camouflage, you can see this is a distinct car. It even has a shorter wheelbase. The battery is different too. Alpine isn't releasing battery capacity or output figures yet, but it's designed to be able to support the three motors' power outputs.

This is a slightly difficult story for Alpine to tell, because the brand is all about cars being light, and as an electric crossover, the A390… isn't that. So supposedly, the A390 is all about creating the A110's feeling of lightness through the torque vectoring and the careful tuning of the traction control and stability control (ESC) systems.

To that end, the specification of the A390 is unusual for a performance car – with some surprisingly thoughtful nods to practicality.

First off, there are those dual rear motors. Polestar tries to achieve much the same effect with a clutch pack on the rear axle, but according to Alpine that solution is slower to respond. What's more, two smaller rear motors back to back are lower

The differences between these two become apparent on track

Sport mode will let you slide it but not as much as we'd like

A390
A390 PROTOTYPE

than one big one, thus allowing a lower boot floor.

Unlike most performance cars with a rear-biased torque distribution, the A390 doesn't have wider tyres at the back: the fronts and rears are the same size. The engineers say that the wider rear track gives the car all the traction and stability it needs, and having four identical tyres makes sourcing replacements easier.

Alpine keeps it simple in other areas too: there's no four-wheel steering and the suspension is passive for the most natural feel (although I imagine that cost plays a part here as well).

The proper launch of the A390 isn't due until 2026, so for now I've only been given a brief, tantalising glimpse at what it can do on the wet handling circuit of Michelin's Ladoux proving ground in France.

Does it shout A110? Not immediately. Over the handful of gutters I got to run over, the ride felt quite tough, and the body feels more resolutely tied down than in the uniquely supple A110. It feels like a pretty big car too, although not one that seems excessively heavy.

There is a clear family resemblance with the Renault 5-based A290. The vaguely hexagonal steering wheel is the same and the subtle but clear feel and feedback coming through it is similar too.

The different drive modes are configured to create distinct experiences but are a world away from the configuration-fest of the Hyundai Ioniq 5 N. There are Normal, Sport and Track modes, plus an Individual mode that lets you mix and match a few parameters, but you can't mess around with the power split or the suspension. The engineers say they would rather give you a handful of good set-ups than infinite bad ones.

Normal mode is very normal. Herein the A390 finds good grip even on the slick surface, and when that runs out, it naturally defaults to mild understeer, with the ESC checking any slides before they have a chance to develop. Sport mode doesn't change the torque distribution but relaxes the ESC and makes the steering slightly heavier. The difference isn't huge, and the car will still fight you if you try to misbehave.

Depending on the trim, your A390 will have either 20in Michelin Pilot Sport EV or 21in Michelin Pilot Sport 4S tyres. The latter sacrifice about 10 miles of range but make the front end feel much keener.

> **"Trying to provoke it and seeing what it will let you get away with is certainly good fun"**

Steering gives good feedback – but this is no A110

Track mode is where things get interesting, with the A390 starting to feel rear-driven. It will rotate on the power, but it's best if you pitch it in on the brakes and then get hard on the accelerator. At this stage, you really feel the difference between the tyre options.

Trying to provoke the car and seeing what it will let you get away with is certainly good fun, but it never feels completely natural, because you always have either the ESC or the four-wheel drive system second-guessing you and pulling you out of a slide when you don't want it to.

So it's not an A110, which is no great shocker, but it does manage a certain feeling of lightness in the context of what is presumably a two-tonne car.

The other question is whether the novel mechanical layout lets this car do things that the Ioniq 5 N or an upper-level Polestar 3, with their mere two motors, can't. From this very limited taster, I'm not sure it does. It's good, it's fun, but it's no dynamic revelation like the first four-wheel-drive M5 or Ioniq 5 N were, with their almost telepathic all-wheel drive systems.

Still, I look forward to seeing the final product and discovering how it compares with the hot Hyundai in more realistic circumstances.

ILLYA VERPRAET

TECH SPEC

ALPINE A390 PROTOTYPE

With its novel layout and resulting agility, the A390 seems like a worthy development of the Alpine name, but there's a lot we don't know yet

Price £80,000 (est)
Engine Three electric motors
Power tbc
Torque tbc
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, 4WD
Kerb weight 2100kg (est)
0-62mph 4.5sec (est)
Top speed tbc
Battery 90kWh (est)
Range, economy tbc
CO$_2$, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Hyundai Ioniq 5 N, Porsche Macan EV

MICHELIN
PINE

TESTER'S NOTE

I've been sworn to secrecy about the interior, but if you've seen the interior of the A290 and of the Renault Scenic, you're free to speculate on what the A390's might look like. **IV**

TESTER'S NOTE
My test car displayed an AI-powered red-light countdown on each of its two screens. It would have been impressive if they weren't four seconds out of sync. An over-the-air fix is inbound… **FP**

TESTED 23.4.25, JINHUA, CHINA **DELIVERIES** AUTUMN

LEAPMOTOR B10

Stellantis-backed Chinese firm's next UK-bound EV is a small crossover

Leapmotor is growing rapidly both in its home market and abroad, becoming the world's 11th-most-popular EV maker last year and aiming to surge into the top five by the end of the decade.

Key to that ambitious plan is an expanded model line-up that will disrupt a number of core segments. Following the T03 city car and C10 family SUV, Leapmotor is gearing up to enter the bustling compact SUV market with the B10.

It's a close match size-wise for the Ford Explorer and Peugeot e-3008, but a UK starting price of around £30,000 will have it quite substantially undercutting them.

That price starts to look especially attractive in the context of a cabin that's remarkably well appointed and agreeably plush in its high-quality fixtures and fittings.

The 420-litre boot is slightly smaller than the Skoda Elroq's but more than capacious enough for daily family-hauling duties, and a six-footer has plenty of room even when behind a similarly tall driver.

The 14.6in touchscreen and 8.8in instrument display are impressive in their clarity and processing speeds, but the former still has too much to do and can be distracting to use on the move.

There's no smartphone mirroring yet, but Leapmotor is working to introduce it in an over-the-air software update in the coming months and it could feature as standard by the time B10s are being unloaded at UK ports this autumn.

Under the floor is a 67.1kWh battery giving an estimated 260-mile range (WLTP test pending), and a single motor on the rear axle gives 215bhp and 177lb ft of torque for a 0-62mph time of 6.8sec.

The maximum charging speed is pegged at a faintly lethargic 80kW, which means 30-80% will take around 20 minutes, but the closely related C10 is set to be upgraded to an 800V electrical architecture soon and the B10 will no doubt follow, boosting charging speeds and improving overall efficiency.

Naturally, my brief drive around a test facility in an early China-spec production car wasn't especially revealing from a performance or agility standpoint, but the car felt pokey on a run up to motorway speeds and decently composed once there. It was sure-footed and predictable around a greasy, fast hairpin, too, and didn't feel especially prone to roll, lending credence to Leapmotor's claims that its cell-to-chassis construction method is a boon to rigidity as well as efficiency. The steering didn't feel laden with feel and propensity to engage but was quick to react and predictable in its responses.

The suspension set-up for global cars is still being tuned, so my car wasn't representative of what will reach showrooms, but it wasn't unnervingly brittle over rumble strips or speed bumps. And while the B10 might look a little under-wheeled, I welcomed the quieter and better-cushioned ride afforded by the thicker tyre sidewalls.

Much remains to be determined, then, and we've taken marks off the C10 for its slow charging, over-dependence on the touchscreen and characterless drive, so the B10 will need to shine in other areas to compensate for those shortcomings. But the early signs suggest it's commendably endowed and impressively finished for the projected price point, as well as competitive in the practical areas where it really counts.

FELIX PAGE

Physical controls inside are few but satisfyingly tactile

Tour of maker's test facility exposed no dynamic vices

TECH SPEC

LEAPMOTOR B10

Could disrupt a busy segment with impressive tech and practicality credentials at an attractive price

Price £30,000 (est)
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 215bhp
Torque 177lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, RWD
Kerb weight 1705kg
0-62mph 6.8sec
Top speed 106mph
Battery 69.9/67.1kWh (total/usable)
Range, economy 260 miles, 3.9mpkWh (est)
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals BYD Atto 3, Ford Explorer, MG S5 EV

UK VERDICTS

TESTED 23.4.25, WORCESTERSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

VOLKSWAGEN TAYRON

Is the Tiguan's new big brother more convincing in seven-seat form?

Before we get started, let's just establish what this new Volkswagen is actually called. We had presumed that 'Tayron' would be pronounced like the River Tay in Scotland. But according to the brand's luminaries, it's actually 'Tie-ron'. So there you go.

The name originally referred to a compact SUV created in and developed for China, but now it's also affixed to this larger, seven-seat SUV (a replacement for the previous-generation Tiguan Allspace), which bosses are proud to point out has been engineered in Europe and is built at Wolfsburg.

We first met the Tayron in five-seat plug-in hybrid form a couple of months ago in sunny Spain and came away quietly impressed. Now we have our first chance to sample it on British roads, this time in entry-level, seven-seat petrol guise.

Like the closely related Skoda Kodiaq, the Tayron is based on the Volkswagen Group's MQB Evo platform, which results in a pleasingly fluid dynamism, despite its tape-stretching dimensions.

The steering is calmly paced and decently weighted, while taut body control (with either the standard suspension or optional DCC adaptive set-up) means the Tayron feels nicely tied down and admirably agile on twisting and rolling country roads.

A brief spin in a PHEV confirms that the 1.5 eTSI's 216kg weight-saving helps it feel a little lighter on its feet, with just a fraction less laziness in direction changes.

Of course, you don't buy a family SUV for high-octane back-road thrills, but the Tayron is polished and poised enough to keep you interested and adds an extra dash of deftness compared with the Kodiaq.

The Tayron does suffer from a little low-speed brittleness (less obvious with DCC) and struggles to isolate sharper imperfections, but it rides with acceptable composure as you pick up the pace.

Factor in good rolling refinement and hushed wind noise and it makes a relaxing long-distance cruiser.

Less calming is the 1.5-litre four-cylinder petrol engine, which gives a useful slug of low-speed torque but sounds strained when worked hard, which is something it will need to do when the Tayron is loaded with people and luggage. With 148bhp and 184lb ft of torque, this is just about the bare minimum you can get away with in a car of this size – although the slick seven-speed dual-clutch automatic gearbox helps make the most of the available urge.

The Tayron isn't short of space for occupants and their belongings. Those sitting in the first two rows get loads of head and leg room, and even with all seven seats in play there's a handy 385 litres of carrying capacity. Maximum capacity is an estate car-humbling 1905 litres.

Less impressive are the third-row seats, which are easy to access but should be reserved for kids. Rivals from Hyundai and Kia are more generous here, albeit pricier too.

The rest of the well-equipped interior does a decent job of blending quality and utility, with high-grade materials throughout and plenty of thoughtful touches, such as a wireless charging pad large enough for two phones.

Volkswagen has also listened to criticism about its recent ergonomic blunders: the twist dial that controls the audio volume and drive modes is a welcome addition, while the touchscreen's menus are relatively easy to navigate, which makes turning off the lane aid a doddle.

The Tayron makes most sense as a seven-seater, and this entry-level model delivers a pleasing blend of practicality, poise and price. But then so does its cheaper Czech cousin.

JAMES DISDALE

Cabin ergonomics and perceived quality are agreeable; it's roomy up front

TECH SPEC

VOLKSWAGEN TAYRON 1.5 eTSI R-LINE

A decent seven-seater in this base petrol form but not one of the best

★★★⯪☆

Price £43,105
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1498cc, turbocharged, petrol, plus ISG
Power 148bhp at 5000-6000rpm
Torque 184lb ft at 1500-3500rpm
Gearbox 7-spd dual-clutch automatic, FWD
Kerb weight 1648kg
0-62mph 9.4sec
Top speed 127mph
Economy 42.9mpg
CO_2, tax band 150g/km, 36%
Rivals Nissan X-Trail, Hyundai Santa Fe

TESTER'S NOTE

You can have a 1.5-litre or 2.0-litre petrol, a 2.0-litre diesel, a plug-in hybrid and even four-wheel drive. The PHEV is a strict five-seater, though. **JD**

TESTED 23.4.25, GLOUCESTERSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

FORD RANGER MS-RT

New sporting variant of luxo-truck takes different approach to Raptor

At first, it's hard to see a purpose for the new £52k Ford Ranger MS-RT, given that there are already seven models in the Ranger line-up. This starts with the no-frills, four-pot XL at £29k and extends upwards to the Baja-influenced Ranger Raptor at £51k, complete with 288bhp 3.0-litre twin-turbo V6, locking differentials, racing shocks and four-wheel drive.

Scan the specifications, though, and light dawns. For all the racy body bits and the claim of "a motorsport aesthetic" for this pick-up truck's styling, the components that matter are the ultra-torquey 3.0-litre turbo diesel V6, the standard four-wheel drive, the 21in alloy wheels wearing 275/45 Continental performance rubber, the 3.5-tonne towing capacity and the butch-looking tow hook protruding from the girder-like rear chassis crossbeam.

The MS-RT seems destined to become the handsome prime mover in a rig that might include a large trailer, caravan or horsebox. Or maybe it will be found on the nation's boat ramps, helping yachts reach their natural habitat.

The MS-RT also has a load capacity of a full 1000kg, rather than the 600kg of the even racier Raptor, below which it sits on the price ladder.

Although it claims the same 'ultimate street truck' vibe as the Raptor, the MS-RT is different in many important ways.

First, the visuals. It has a uniquely sporty frontal treatment with different grille details and low-level air scoops that emphasise its 40mm-lower-riding suspension. There's a roof spoiler at the end of the cab, another on top of the tailgate and the rear underbody affects a diffuser – more show than go. There are electric retractable running boards, too, that fold out when you open a door.

While it uses the same 10-speed automatic gearbox as other Ranger variants, the MS-RT has a diesel rather than a petrol V6, which means its fuel consumption is always 30% better than the petrol Raptor and it will cruise at least 150 miles farther on a tank. Even

The sporty trappings inside this Ranger variant are bespoke

> **“There’s a limit to just how much a fundamentally cumbersome truck can benefit from agility tweaks”**

It rolls less and grips better than you might believe possible of a truck

TESTER’S NOTE

MS-RT stands for M-Sport Road Technology, a business that grew out of the Cumbria-based M-Sport rally engineering outfit. It specialises in spicing up commercial Fords, and more models are tipped to follow its Transit Custom van and new Ranger. **SC**

so, it produces 20% more torque (443lb ft at 1750-2250rpm), although its power of 237bhp at a relaxed 3250rpm does give ground to the higher-revving Raptor’s 288bhp at 5500rpm. But performance isn’t far behind: the 0-62mph sprint takes 8.7sec, about a second slower.

Inside, the MS-RT uses the same pleasantly car-like collection of materials that give an aura of quality with long-life durability.

The sporty front seats, similar but different in design from the Raptor’s, have exaggerated side bolsters and are faced with a combination of suede and ‘non-animal leather’, which works fine.

The central touchscreen is reminiscent of the Raptor’s but the display directly ahead of the driver is simpler and less configurable.

Lots of Raptor toys – a variety of settings for steering effort, damper stiffness, angry exhaust note – are missing but you still get an excellent rear-view camera, speed limit sign recognition, keyless entry, active park assist, rain-sensing wipers and a variety of dash-selectable drive modes (Normal, Eco, Tow Haul, Slippery, Mud/Ruts and Sand). There’s also a familiar rotary selector for the various transmission modes (2WD, 4WD Auto, 4WD Locked), plus hill descent control. In short, this is a comprehensively equipped but easily understood cabin.

The engine is quiet, smooth, strong and nearly always unobtrusive, especially since its low-end shove means there’s no point in revving it hard.

The auto ’box works well most of the time but doesn’t have the control offered by the Raptor’s column-mounted shift paddles. Instead there are three close-packed and near-invisible switches on one side of the central gearknob, meant to allow the driver to control the gearbox manually. You feel for them in moments of need and invariably get it wrong, not least because it’s difficult to remember which anonymous button does what. It’s the MS-RT’s poorest control feature.

If you’re used to the quality damping and relatively soft ride of the Raptor, you won’t much enjoy the ride quality of the MS-RT. It takes a different direction, riding lower with less suspension travel and running deliberately stiffer dampers. This controls body roll well, takes advantage of the big, sporty tyres and sharpens the steering, but there’s a limit to just how much a fundamentally cumbersome, 5.4m-long vehicle weighing 2.3 tonnes can benefit from agility tweaks.

The unladen ride is poor, especially at low speeds. The MS-RT crashes into potholes and picks up surface irregularities more than both its siblings and its rivals. Some buyers won’t mind, liking the motorsport associations, but, being kind, this feels like one of those trucks from the olden days that ‘needs a couple of cement bags in the back’.

Things do improve if you go faster, but authentic comfort, even average comfort, is not this Ranger’s strong suit. It’s easy to imagine plenty of buyers being attracted by the MS-RT’s image, durability and good looks. No argument, it draws admiring glances, but we would advise any serious customer to take a good, long road test over typical UK roads before they commit.

STEVE CROPLEY

TECH SPEC

FORD RANGER 3.0 TD ECOBLUE MS-RT

Attempt to give truck a motorsport persona works on most levels but ride quality is problematic

★★★☆☆

Price £52,141 (excluding VAT)
Engine V6, 2993cc, turbocharged, diesel
Power 237bhp at 3250rpm
Torque 443lb ft at 1750-2250rpm
Gearbox 10-spd automatic, 4WD
Kerb weight 2295kg
0-62mph 8.7sec
Top speed 111mph
Economy 22.0mpg
CO_2, tax band 334g/km, 37%
Rivals Ineos Grenadier Quartermaster 3.0, Toyota Hilux 2.8, Volkswagen Amarok 3.0

ROAD TESTS

AUTOCAR **ROAD TEST 5744**

LAND ROVER DEFENDER

The Octa cranks everything up to 11. Result: otherworldly 4x4 or OTT?

MODEL TESTED

LAND ROVER DEFENDER 110 P635 OCTA EDITION 1

Price £163,545
Power 626bhp at 5855-7000rpm
Torque 553lb ft at 1800-5855rpm
0-60mph 4.6sec
30-70mph 3.7sec
Top speed 130mph (claimed)
Average economy 19.9mpg
Touring economy 22.1mpg
CO_2 emissions 304g/km
70-0mph 56.7m (14deg C, dry)

How does one begin to define a vehicle as multi-faceted as Land Rover's Defender P635 Octa? One thing's for sure: the process can take you down numerous paths.

First, is the 626bhp Octa the most ambitious product the company has launched since the original Range Rover? In many ways, from engineering to sales, yes, it absolutely is. No Land Rover has ever been conceived with such scope in respect to its all-terrain ability and drivability. Or price.

Could the Octa also be said to have a genetic make-up achievable by blending DNA from the BMW M5 CS with one of McLaren's supercars and a T1+ Dakar rally-raider, of the sort you'll have seen competing in the Dakar Rally? Incredible as it sounds, that isn't far from the truth.

More broadly, is this carbon-adorned Defender for everyday use, family trips away or weekends doing specialised off-road activities? The hardware says it's all three.

As for what it is not? At £148,000 even before you get to the limited-release Edition 1 car tested here, the Octa is not an inexpensive car. In terms of price, in the broader Defender line-up it is very much positioned as the 911 GT3 RS or Huracán STO and is aimed at a similar clientele.

Neither is this car going to be free from quirks in normal driving. One reason why the Octa can happily fire itself down dusty back roads at frightening speeds is because of its new suspension, which makes for tracks 68mm wider than those on the standard and hardly slimline Defender. No matter how expert the chassis tuning, the Octa will need handling with care in a way something humdrum like, say, a Porsche Cayenne Turbo wouldn't.

Which brings us to one last point on the subject of what the Octa is and is not. Is it necessary? Unless you see yourself needing to escape from the bad guys by travelling at speed over rough and varied terrain, and you need to do it in comfort and a reasonable level of luxury, then no, of course this car isn't necessary. And we dare say it will be easier to find chances to explore the full potential of the aforementioned supercars at track days than it will this extra-special Defender, unless you happen to own half the county.

But when did necessity concern cars made with imagination? And it's this, above all else, that most neatly defines the Defender Octa.

Twin-turbo V8 is shared with the M5 CS

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★★★

PROS Involved modification to the chassis; epic off-road numbers
CONS Wider than the regular car; no 90-wheelbase version, as yet

The Octa is clearly inspired by rally-raid culture and there's almost no area of the regular car's mechanical package that hasn't been adapted.

Starting at the front, the BMW-sourced 4.4-litre twin-turbo V8 is new to the Defender line-up. (The supercharged 5.0-litre in the mainline V8 model will continue to be offered.) It's essentially the motor from the M5 CS, making an identical 626bhp and 553lb ft – totals never before lavished on a Land Rover designed to go almost anywhere off road, albeit quite slowly. Certainly, 'hot vee' is a term we're not used to using when it comes to the Defender, and the Octa's mill also benefits from mild-hybrid tech in the form of a 48V integrated starter-generator that exists in place of an alternator and can feed up to 27bhp into the mix. Also note that the Octa's V8 isn't a straight transplant from the Range Rover Sport, where it already serves. The intake and exhaust system are quite different and, even compared with the regular Defender, there's a new oil sump, along with a new, stiffened transmission cradle.

That transmission is the same ZF eight-speed automatic as the Octa's range-mates', though downstream of it you'll find a unique propshaft and larger-diameter driveshafts, while the rear e-differential also benefits from higher-strength steel.

It's clear that in setting out to be the ultimate Defender, the Octa needed more of everything. More ground clearance and bigger approach and departure angles. More grip and handling dynamism, both on road and off it. More performance, but no less any-surface drivability. More driver appeal everywhere. No compromises anywhere. Chuck out the rulebook and start again.

The suspension is where the Octa's specific approach really becomes apparent. It gets axle hardware entirely different from a regular Defender's (longer wishbones, new hubs and uprights, new mountings and bushings and more). As suggested by those unmissable arches, it also sits on tracks stretched by a Herculean 68mm and it rides 28mm higher than a regular Defender, on air suspension that still allows the car to hike itself up or hunker down in line with the selected driving mode.

The axle makeover creates extra capability, sure enough: wading depth rises from 900mm to 1000mm, the maximum departure angle is taken from 40deg to 43deg and ground clearance is an epic 323mm, up from 291mm. Wheel articulation also increases 100mm to 550mm.

Forged 20in alloys aren't something you'd normally expect to find on a Defender, but the Octa isn't normal. If you want to unlock the car's potential 150mph top speed, you'll need to option the 22in wheels and have them shod in the all-season Michelin tyres.

The regular Defender's wishbones aren't small but the Octa's are prehistoric in their scale. They're both longer and stronger than what you'll find on a garden 90 or 110. The Octa also forgoes anti-roll bars, which aren't needed with the hydraulically linked dampers.

But crucially, the added width also allows the Octa's axles to match those of a normal Defender for roll centre height – and concurrently for the car to keep its roll axis from migrating upwards along with its body profile. So despite standing so much taller than a standard Defender and having more wheel travel to put to use, the Octa has no greater proclivity to roll than the regular car, and that's before you get to the dampers…

The Octa marks the Defender's first use of hydraulically cross-linked dampers. They're semi-active, in effect. With the help of accumulators, each damper is able to exert a little force, rather than simply absorbing it. This is similar to McLaren's approach with its Super Series cars (so no anti-roll bars). Tenneco is behind the system, which promises to manage roll and pitch with a level of control no street-legal Defender has known.

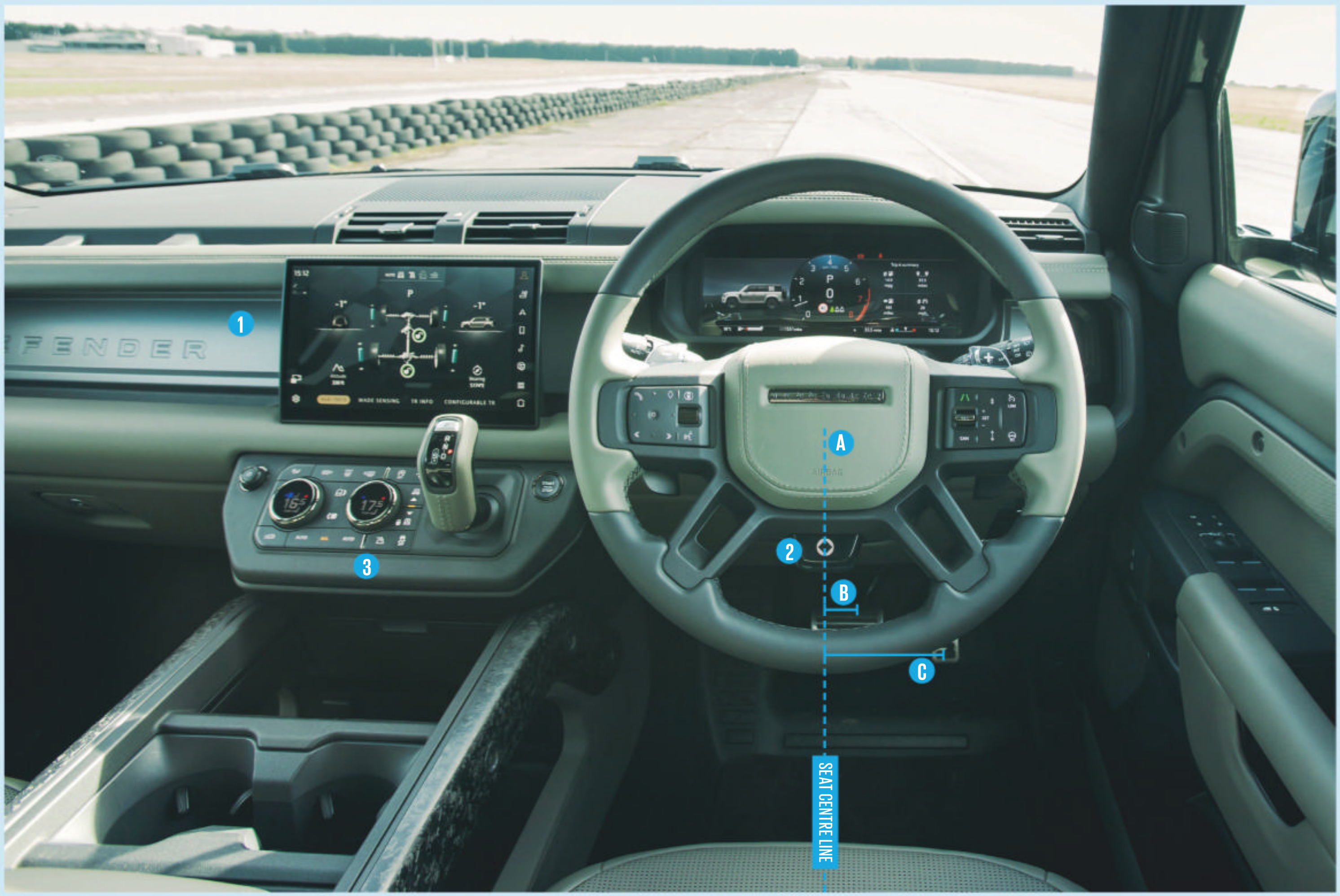
The Octa is also the first modern Land Rover to come on factory-fitted all-terrain tyres: triple-ply Goodyear Wranglers tougher and more puncture-resistant even than regular ATs (although you can have road-biased Michelins or mid-ranking BF Goodrich all-terrains, ▶

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

① Octa's the first Land Rover to use this material finish – a 'chopped', reconstituted carbonfibre of the sort you may have already seen on the likes of the Lamborghini Huracán Performante.

② A bit like a BMW M car, the Octa has a special steering wheel-mounted button as a shortcut straight to its fruitiest mode: 'Octa' (obviously). It glows red when selected, as do the paddles.

③ Extra-special Defender has the same well-considered smattering of physical switchgear as the normal car, most of it wrought in a high-quality matt plastic that perfectly suits the car.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 40mm right Ⓒ Accelerator offset 170mm right. Bucket seats add sporting intent to the Defender's trademark commanding – and very comfortable – driving position.

◂ if you prefer, as fitted to our Octa).

Naturally, none of this comes for free in terms of kerb weight. Our car came in at 2717kg with its 90-litre tank brimmed (and not forgetting the full-size spare mounted to the side-hinged back door). Mind you, the distribution was a perfect 50:50.

INTERIOR

★★★★☆

PROS Well laid out, with good switchgear; doesn't go OTT
CONS No seven-seat option; boot door still swings open on a wide arc

But for the 'chopped' carbonfibre trim of Edition 1 Octas and some new, well-shaped, comfortable 'Body and Soul' semi-bucket seats (which, like those of the Range Rover Sport SV, have built-in speakers that can broadcast bass-frequency sound directly at your backside), our test car had no performance-derivative cabin frippery at all. Climb up into the cabin and the Defender's sense of integrity is very much intact. There is a small but interesting range of upholstery options, with khaki, brown and light grey variously available in Ultrafabrics and semi-aniline leathers. Perceived quality is very high too, from the stitching to the switchgear plastics.

Elsewhere, the usual Defender space and versatility are present. Coming as a 110 model only, the Octa offers four passenger doors, plus the side-opening boot door with a spare wheel attached, which you are likely to have cause to curse in tight parking spaces for how tricky it can make boot access (and may be why so many Defender owners prefer parking nose in). This model is also available with only a five-seat cabin layout, though each and every one of those occupants will have plenty of space to enjoy.

Look carefully and you will find one or two black diamond motifs – the badge ident of the Octa derivative – around the interior, most notably on the drive mode button at six o'clock on the steering wheel (more on which shortly).

Otherwise, the cabin offers lots of useful storage areas, including the open-worked centre console, with its clever hidden sliding tray. There's even a USB-C port in the dashboard cut-out on the passenger side.

JLR's Pivi Pro infotainment console proves mostly easy to navigate and has useful off-roading display modes. (External cameras help you to judge the extremities of the car when driving over and around obstacles, for example.)

PERFORMANCE

★★★★½

PROS Warm V8 character; superb mid-range thrust; clever 'box
CONS Won't be rorty enough for some; braking requires awareness

How quick your Octa is will depend on which tyres you specify. The claimed 3.8sec 0-60mph time is set on the road-ready Michelins – and, we suspect, using a car devoid of its spare wheel and without much fuel in the tank. Our car, wearing its knobby-ish BF Goodrich tyres with their added rotational inertia, and carrying not only the spare but also a full tank (with a combined additional mass of about 130kg), punted itself to 60mph in 4.6sec and onto 100mph in 10.1sec. It's a little off the manufacturer's claim, but understandably so and still remarkable pace given that, for Octa duties, the Defender hasn't dialled down its off-road ability but has actually increased it. Note also that the Octa is, in this specification, still quicker to 100mph than the mad Range Rover Sport SVR we tested in 2015 – perhaps as close to a Land Rover-built super-saloon as has ever seen the cold light of day.

There's nothing wrong with the delivery of this BMW V8 either. It's enjoyably responsive and linear, and while some would have wanted its exhaust note to be rortier still, in the manner of the Sport SVR, which you could hear miles away with the valves open, the Octa's subtler roar has its own appeal.

Combined with the ZF's gearbox, it metes out its laid-back muscle and is in general excellent company, especially when combined with such judicious tuning of the shift strategy, which nearly always seems to get it right whether you're ambling around town or lining up an A-road overtake in Dynamic mode, when the Octa's body also hunkers down a touch.

With the new 400mm Brembo front discs, slowing the car is no hassle in most situations and the brake pedal also has a resolute feel that breeds confidence. But you do need to be aware of this car's mass, which it otherwise disguises so impressively. It's the same for all cars of this ilk. In good conditions, on the Goodrich tyres, an emergency stop from 70mph takes just under 57m – only 5% more than the lighter, road-tyre-shod Mercedes-Benz G500 needed when we road tested it.

RIDE & HANDLING

★★★★⯪

PROS Takes the Defender package to unimagined heights, everywhere

CONS Doesn't grip or corner like a trad super-SUV, unsurprisingly

To the function of that new button at the base of the steering wheel boss, then. Prod it once to put the Octa into Dynamic mode (suspension set to low and firm, exhaust to noisy and stability control dialled back for fast road driving); hold it down to enter Octa mode. This maintains the car's ride height but hikes its damping reserves; shifts its default four-wheel-drive torque split to about 80% rear; disables its roll stability control system; and reprograms its traction and stability controls – and even the ABS – for maximum fun 'on the loose'.

As we learned at the car's launch in South Africa, the resulting driving experience is an awful lot of fun and even a little jaw-dropping. On gravel and dirt, Land Rover has tuned the Octa to be playful and adjustable as it progressively tucks itself into corners at speed, deliberately starting to lock and bury its front wheels into the dirt under braking, thanks to special ABS tuning, and then rotating gamely around them. Stability then gathers with power and corrective steering angle, as you'd probably want in a high-sided, 2.5-tonne car. The point is that you really can mess around with the handling attitude on a trailing throttle and back it into turns at will, so long as there's room.

Take it as read that, alongside the dust fests, the Octa can also handle the mucky stuff – traditionally a Defender's bread and butter. Outside of Octa mode, it still has the regular car's suite of terrain settings, only now with the benefit of the increased approach, departure and breakover angles. Horiba MIRA's off-road course gets considerably more difficult than what you can see in the images on these pages and our test car lapped it up.

And so to the road. Much has been made of the Octa's potential for width-, weight- and height-defying dynamics and, in many respects, the hype is well earned. The Octa has a marginally quicker steering response than the regular Defender but the real reason it feels so much more agile and, frankly, manageable than its off-the-shelf range-mates is mostly to do with the new cross-linked suspension. Especially in Dynamic mode, the car's resistance to pitch and squat is notably reduced, and while roll movements start off in a familiar fashion, they're quickly curtailed and the body's deftly supported. For any Defender to conduct itself like this is remarkable, not least in the context of the Octa's broadened off-road envelope. Moreover, the Octa retains the regular car's natural manner – the ease and fluidity that result from body movements being so well matched to cornering force and steering input, only with a much tighter operational window. It means that, even on the Goodrich tyres, you can put the Octa down a decent road just as quickly as you like, without having to worry about any unpleasant surprises the topography might throw up.

Is the Octa a driver's car, then? Of sorts, yes. There's satisfaction to be had here, though you are still ultimately dealing with a high centre of gravity, geometry that must cope with extreme off-road scenarios, and plenty of weight transfer. Certainly, think twice before cancelling that Cayenne Turbo S E-Hybrid order if outright dynamism is your priority.

Lastly, and as if the Octa needed another string to its bow, is touring ability. In Comfort mode, you're treated to a languid gait but on many surfaces Octa mode itself yields the best ride quality. Combined with effortless torque, superb visibility and precise steering that doesn't subtly leech your concentration, as it can in the regular car, the Octa is excellent company on long drives.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★☆☆

PROS Rather a rare proposition; undercuts AMG and some others

CONS Much more expensive than the normal V8; crippling economy

The Octa was launched in special Edition 1 trim – a familiar kind of 'curated' limited-volume spec combining particular paint and trim colours with some richer trim materials. It costs £163,545, though the basic Octa (which is nothing of the sort) is just over £148,000. It puts this rarefied Defender into the territory of hot Cayennes, if not quite that of the Aston Martin DBX and Lamborghini Urus. Or, indeed, perhaps the car's closest rival in terms of pace, luxury and off-road chops: AMG's superb G63, which now starts at just under £182k.

It's a leap up from what was the fruitiest Defender pre-Octa – the 5.0-litre V8 P425 Defender 110 X – but owners probably won't have too much trouble justifying the outlay.

Of course, economy is diabolical. You'll do well to average 20mpg and this will nosedive if you use the car as intended. Test touring economy was marginally better at 22.1mpg, but even with the 90-litre tank, that yields a range of only 438 miles. ▸

FRONT Leg room 1090mm, head room 1050mm. Octa pulls off the trick of feeling spacious yet enjoyably snug and secure up front – no complaints.

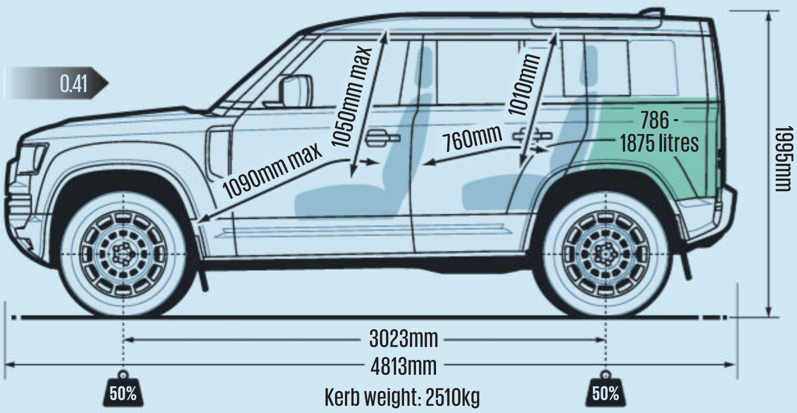
REAR Leg room 760mm, head room 1010mm. Sculpted seats and plenty of knee room – and light, with a panoramic roof – make it rather nice here too.

BOOT Length 950-1780mm, width 970-1500mm, height 900mm. Boot cavity is usefully squared off and as generously capacious as it always was.

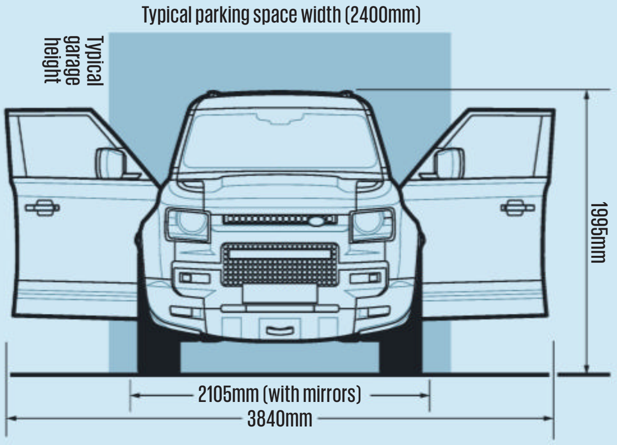
"The experience is a lot of fun and even a little jaw-dropping"

TEST RESULTS

DIMENSIONS


0.41
1090mm max
1050mm max
760mm
1010mm
786 - 1875 litres
1995mm
3023mm
4813mm
50%
50%
Kerb weight: 2510kg

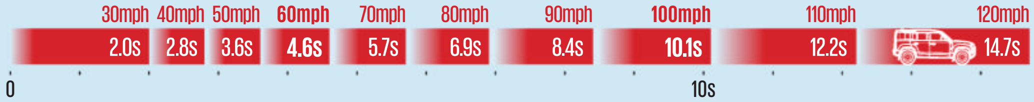
PARKING


Typical parking space width (2400mm)
Typical garage height
1995mm
2105mm (with mirrors)
3840mm

ACCELERATION

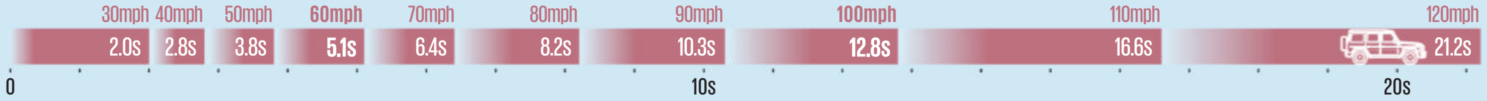
Test conditions 14deg C, dry

Standing quarter mile 12.9sec at 113.1mph **Standing km** 23.4sec at 133.0mph **30-70mph** 3.7sec **30-70mph in fourth** 5.4sec **0-62mph** 4.8sec



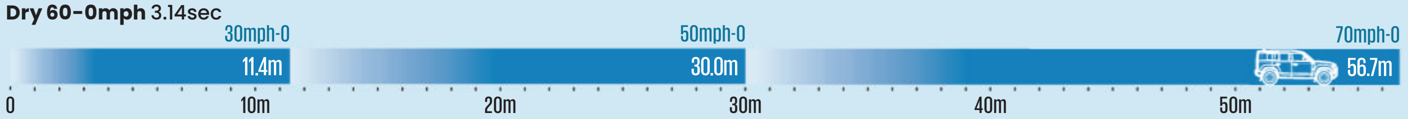
Mercedes-Benz G500 AMG Line Premium Plus (2024, 20deg C, dry)

Standing quarter mile 13.6sec at 102.6mph **Standing km** 25.2sec at 127.0mph **30-70mph** 4.5sec **30-70mph in fourth** 6.8sec

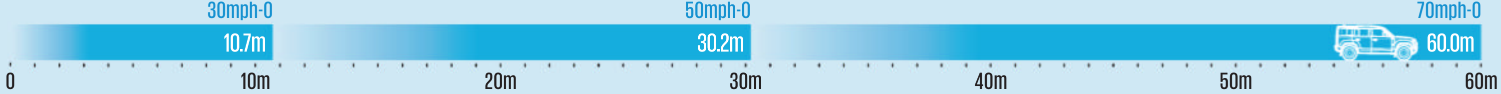


BRAKING

Dry 60-0mph 3.14sec



Wet 60-0mph 3.28sec

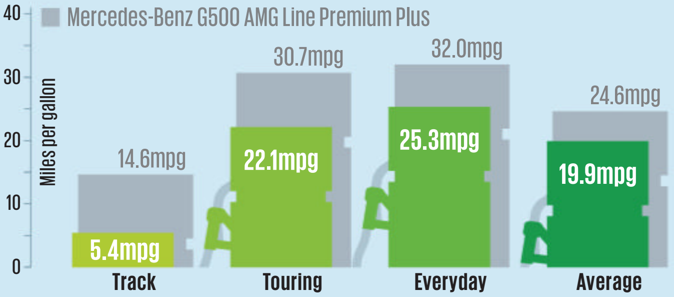


ACCELERATION IN GEAR

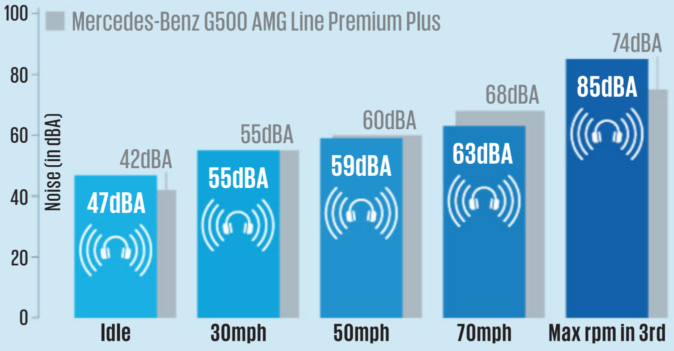
mph	Time (sec) 2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th
20-40	1.5	2.3	3.0				
30-50	1.6	2.1	2.6	3.7	6.4		
40-60		2.2	2.7	3.6	4.9		
50-70		2.3	2.8	3.7	4.8		
60-80			2.9	3.9	5.1		
70-90			3.0	4.1	5.4		
80-100			3.3	4.4	6.0		
90-110				4.7	6.6		
100-120				5.1	7.7		
110-130				5.9	9.3		

RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 21.0mpg (combined) **Test range** 394/438/501 miles (average/touring/everyday)

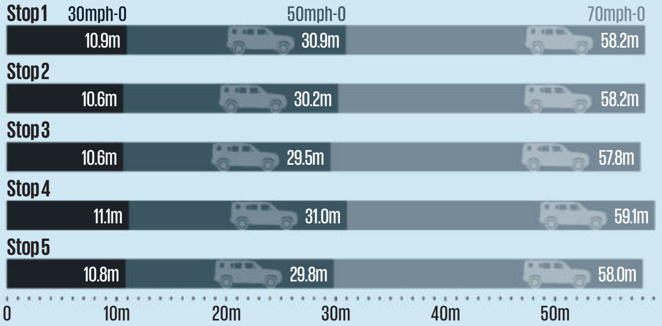


CABIN NOISE



BRAKING ENDURANCE

Fade variance 70-0m – stop 1 vs stop 5: -0.2m



PETER LIDDIARD

THE SMALL PRINT Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. Running efficiency is tested on a closed test track; 'touring' is representative of UK motorway driving, 'everyday' of intra-urban driving. Acceleration, braking and cabin noise are measured on reference surfaces, for cabin noise using a handheld decibel meter. Charging equipment used for rapid-charging tests may vary, but charger power always exceeds the advertised peak draw of the test car. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission.

MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

LAND ROVER DEFENDER 110 P635 OCTA EDITION 1

On-the-road price £163,545
Price as tested £165,105
Value after 3yrs/36k miles £83,425
Typical PCP* £2245 pcm (£14,804 deposit + 36 months/30,000 miles)
*Standard Octa
Insurance group 50E

FITTED EQUIPMENT

Standard 20in diamond-turned alloy wheels, Khaki/Ebony perforated Ultrafabrics seats, chopped carbonfibre seatbacks **Optional** Electrically deployable towbar £1230, black roof rails £330 **Also available** Fixed side steps £1995, carbon twin raised intakes £3503, expedition roof rack £1673

ENGINE

Installation Front, longitudinal, 4WD
Type V8, 4395cc, twin-turbocharged, petrol, plus 48V ISG
Power 626bhp at 5855-7000rpm
Torque 553lb ft at 1800-5855rpm
Redline 7000rpm
Specific output 142bhp per litre
Power to weight 249bhp per tonne
Torque to weight 220lb ft per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 8-spd automatic
Ratios/mph per 1000rpm
1st 4.71/5.6 **2nd** 3.14/8.4 **3rd** 2.11/12.5 **4th** 1.67/15.8 **5th** 1.28/20.6 **6th** 1.00/26.3 **7th** 0.84/31.3 **8th** 0.67/39.3
Final drive ratio 3.73:1 **rpm in top gear at 70/80mph** 1783/2038

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Aluminium and steel monocoque
Weight/as tested 2510kg/2717kg
Weight distribution (f/r) 50%/50%
Drag coefficient 0.41
Wheels 8.5Jx20in **Tyres** 275/60 R20 116H, BF Goodrich Trail-Terrain T/A
Spare Full-size, tailgate-mounted
Fuel tank 90 litres (under rear seats, filler on offside rear wing)

SUSPENSION & STEERING

Front and rear Double wishbones, air springs, hydraulically cross-linked adaptive dampers **Steering** EPAS, rack and pinion; 2.4 turns lock to lock; 13.1m turning circle

BRAKES

Front 400mm ventilated discs, six-piston calipers **Rear** 365mm ventilated discs, single-piston calipers **Handbrake type** Electronic, automatic, dash (right-hand side)

SAFETY

Euro NCAP rating 5 stars (2020)
Adult occupant 85%, child occupant 85%, vulnerable road users 71%, safety assist 79%

EMISSIONS & TAX

CO₂ 304g/km
BIK at 20/40% pcm £1009/£2017

VERDICT

Outrageous, unnecessary and totally awe-inspiring

★★★★½

Creating a new model laser-focused on one area of extra-special capability almost always reduces overall breadth, sometimes to an infuriating extent. (Take the current Porsche 911 GT3 RS, which swaps the regular handy frunk for a motorsport radiator.) The magic of the Octa, and a serious tribute to the engineers behind it, is that such a reality has been not merely avoided but in fact inverted. The Octa is wild fun in the rally-raid-esque environment for which it has been primarily devised, but it's also a sweeter-handling car on ordinary roads and a usefully more capable companion off those sealed surfaces than the already excellent Defender 110. It pushes the Defender's spider chart of attributes outwards in every meaningful direction (including price, of course) and does it with a charm that makes it oh so easy to love.

TESTERS' NOTES

RICHARD LANE
In a single day, I took the Octa from cramped London up to MIRA, where it not only nailed that 12.9sec quarter mile but also sauntered through the brutal off-road course as if it were a sand pit, and then I bombed it to Cumbria on the M6. I arrived feeling rested. Perhaps another car could have done all that. Can't think what.

MATT SAUNDERS
I drove the car in anger on its international media launch in South Africa. If you ever find yourself needing to fly down an undulating gravel track at 85mph, trust me, you'll be fine.

FACELIFT FIXES

- Continue to improve braking performance on the off-road tyres.
- Devise an extra-silly exhaust mode, for those who want it.
- Expand the exterior colour palette.

RANKING RIVALS

	1	2	3	4		
	LAND ROVER DEFENDER OCTA					
		MERCEDES-AMG G63 Still a supremely capable off-roader, and one that stands up to the Octa on the road. Beaten, mind.	**JEEP WRANGLER RUBICON 392** Not as neat to drive on road as the Octa or as quick off it. But it's still a world-class, V8 rock-climber.	**FORD RANGER RAPTOR** A third of the price of the Octa but still exceptionally good off road, with a charming V6 mill.	**FORD BRONCO RAPTOR** Direct rival to the Wrangler is a serious off-roader with no end of optional kit. We'd love a go.	**TOYOTA HILUX T1+** Sadev 'box, Reiger dampers, Hallspeed diffs – and a hulking V8. Used racer would scratch that rally-raid itch very nicely.
		★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆		
Price		£181,805	£110,00 (est)	£52,140	£115,000 (est)	£500,000 (est)
Power, torque		577bhp, 627lb ft	470bhp, 470lb ft	288bhp, 362lb ft	455bhp, 536lb ft	335bhp, 413lb ft
0-62mph, top speed		4.4sec, 137mph	4.7sec, 99mph	7.9sec, 111mph	5.5sec (est), 111mph	4.5sec (est), 110mph
CO₂, economy		338g/km, 19.1mpg	na	315g/km, 20.5mpg	na	na

AUTOCAR **ROAD TEST 5745**

CITROEN E-C3

Junior EV leads fightback against low-cost Chinese challengers

Concerned voices continue to debate the influence that Chinese-import electric cars will have on the European market in the longer term. In 2024, concerned European legislators even ruled to impose tariffs on them.

But, until now, very few European car makers have actually grasped the nettle and sought to match what we might consider China-typical value in a European-made, affordable electric car.

That is ostensibly what Stellantis's new Smart Car model platform has been designed to do – and the fourth-generation Citroën C3 and brand-new ë-C3, the subject of this test, become its first-borne fruit.

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★★☆

PROS Pragmatic platform engineering hits its target on value; fashionable crossover positioning
CONS Limited kerbside appeal

The Smart Car platform that underpins this car has been derived from Stellantis's proven Common Modular Platform (CMP). It's adaptable enough to be used to produce both EV and ICE models, and it will also father the new C3 Aircross, Fiat Grande Panda and other Stellantis low-cost cars.

Not that all are likely to be as quirky as this Citroën. The double chevron continues to count daring design among its raisons d'être and has really developed the crossover-inspired design themes flirted with by the third-generation C3 here. With a bluff nose and a roofline rising to 1577mm (Vauxhall Corsa 1433mm, Renault Clio 1440mm, Nissan Juke 1593mm), this is plainly a compact SUV kind of product.

While both C3 models use a 1.2-litre three-cylinder turbo petrol engine as a primary power source, the ë-C3 enters its own market niche as a fairly modestly powerful, and short-range, simple EV. Its electric motor produces 111bhp and 92lb ft of torque, and draws power from an LFP drive battery with a usable capacity of 43.7kWh. That may not sound like much, but both Mini and Renault charge more and give less of the stuff in their cheapest Cooper and 5 rivals.

INTERIOR

★★★★☆

PROS Relatively spacious; practical design and layout; simple usability
CONS 310-litre boot isn't crossover-typical

There is some practical sense in allowing the C3 to grow five inches taller. An upwards stretch doesn't affect how much space this car takes up at the kerb and it allows Citroën to offset the impact on cabin packaging of an underfloor battery pack and also to give occupants more outright space by sitting them less recumbently

MODEL TESTED

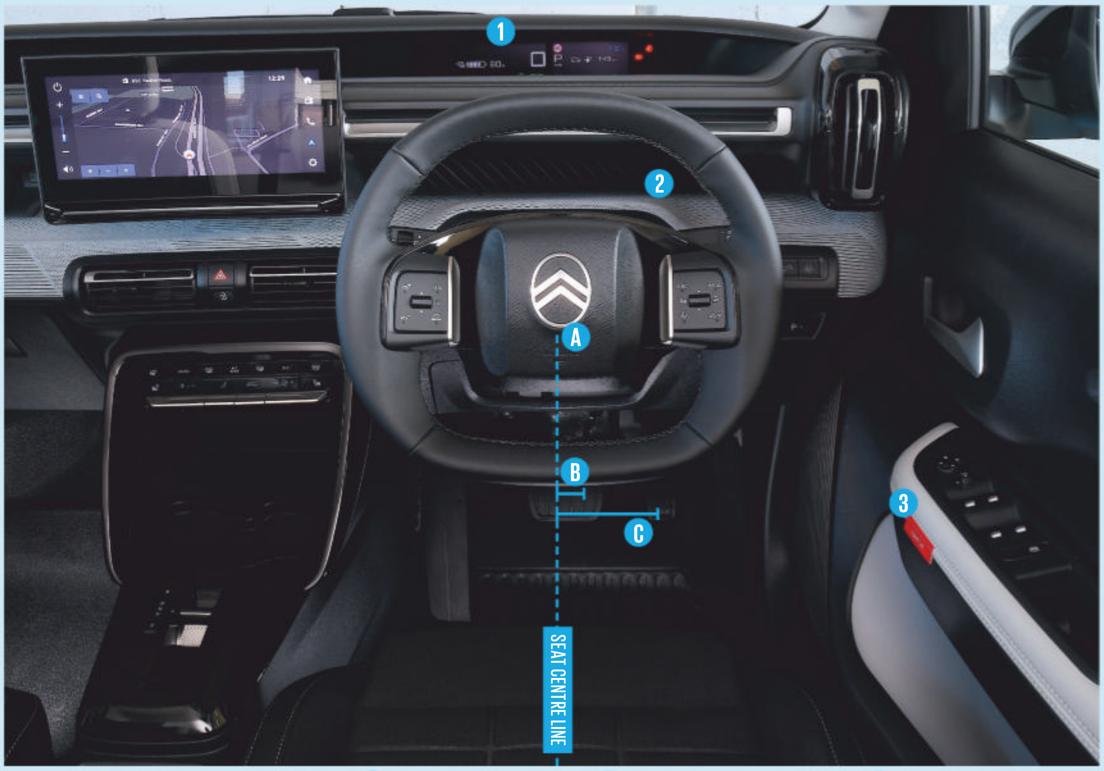
CITROEN E-C3 MAX

Price £23,795
Power 111bhp
Torque 92lb ft
0-60mph 10.7sec
30-70mph 10.3sec
Top speed 84mph
70-0mph 44.8m (15deg C, dry)
Range na/122/175 miles (average/touring/everyday)
Economy na/2.8/4.0mpkWh (average/touring/everyday)
Weighted average charging rate 60kW

① High-set instrument panel is actually projected from an upwards-facing display recessed into the upper dash and reflected towards the driver. Clever.

② Split-level fascia makes for a shallow storage shelf at steering wheel level. Shame there aren't ribs in it to stop items from roving around laterally.

③ Each cabin door has a label with messages such as 'have fun' and 'feel good'. These kinds of touches are usually off-putting but the ë-C3 is endearing.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 20mm right Ⓒ Accelerator offset 150mm right. Footwell is quite roomy with a good-sized footrest. Low-set steering column is fairly adjustable.

than they would otherwise be.

Thus the ë-C3 becomes quite a spacious-feeling supermini, one with particularly abundant head room in the front row and enough space in the second row for most adults to be fairly comfortable.

We measured 1010mm of front-row head room (20mm more than in the Toyota Yaris) and 660mm of second-row leg room (Toyota Yaris 630mm, Nissan Micra 640mm). The car's seat cushions lack a little useful inclination angle but, while there's some compromise to longer-distance comfort in the back due to the highish cabin floor, the seats in the front are comfortably padded and are moderately adjustable.

The ë-C3's driving position feels a little like one borrowed from sibling brand Peugeot's i-Cockpit playbook. The steering wheel is small and the column low-sprouting, while the all-digital instrumentation pod sits high on the fascia right at the base of the windscreen.

The primary control layout works reasonably well. The space it liberates on the full-width, double-tier dashboard itself makes for lots of oddment storage, and the little corners and flat surfaces can be decorated with colourful knick-knacks, should you be so inclined.

MULTIMEDIA

★★★☆☆

PROS Does the basics okay; has wireless mirroring and charging
CONS Some useful features are sacrificed on the altar of simplicity

The ë-C3's provision of physical heating and ventilation controls, mirror adjusters and even proper buttons for the deactivation of key ADAS functions shows you how much Citroën appreciates simplicity and usability.

The studious simplicity of the 10.3in touchscreen infotainment system might actually be a little too much. It offers no trip computer functionality, for instance, and no way to toggle the electronic traction or stability controls, nor even any option to switch the factory navigation system's units of measurement from metric to imperial (our test car's was stuck on the former).

Wireless smartphone mirroring is standard on both Plus and Max models, though, and our experience suggests that's what you will use. And, more widely, the display isn't too distracting, mostly because the system's remit is quite limited.

PERFORMANCE

★★★½☆

PROS Could hardly be easier to drive; copes fine out of town; low charge doesn't slow it down
CONS It's never quick; no proper manual regen controls

This is very much an uncomplicated 'get you from A to B' kind of car. And, provided that points A and B aren't too distant from each other, it works rather well.

The ë-C3 isn't quick, and feels borderline feeble when putting on speed above 50mph. Apart from those moments, though, it typically copes at least fairly well at A-road and motorway speeds, and feels more assertive and at home in urban traffic.

Simplicity is the abiding theme here too. Citroën offers no one-pedal driving mode, and no steering wheel paddles for regen control. There isn't even a 'B' mode on the drive selector, which most other EVs offer as a kind of maximum trailing-throttle motor regen setting. In its place is a 'C' button, which ▸

■ Contrast roof is standard, as are the aerodynamic-looking, Citroën-branded roof bars. They will let you affix a rack or a box in which you can carry an extra 75kg of cargo.

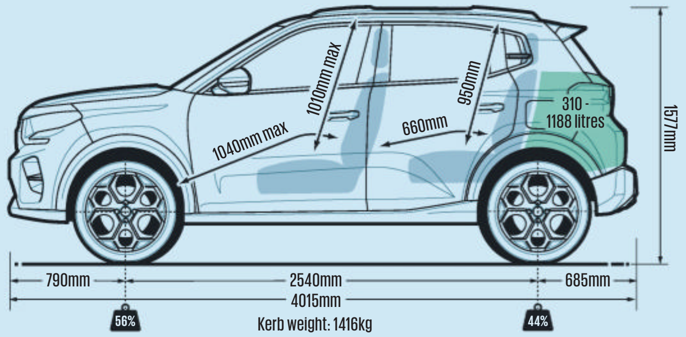
■ These 17in part-painted alloys are the only wheels on offer but have an appealing geometric look. Economy-biased Goodyear tyres provide reasonable grip and traction.

PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN BRADSHAW

TEST RESULTS

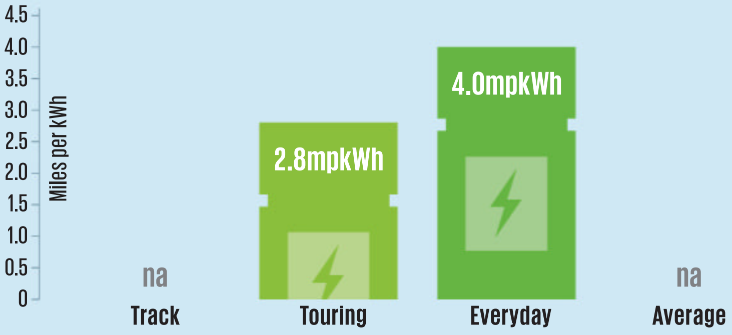
DIMENSIONS

Length 4015mm **Width** 1813mm/2020mm (with/without mirrors) **Height** 1577mm **Door span** 3550mm **Max height to open bootlid** 2030mm



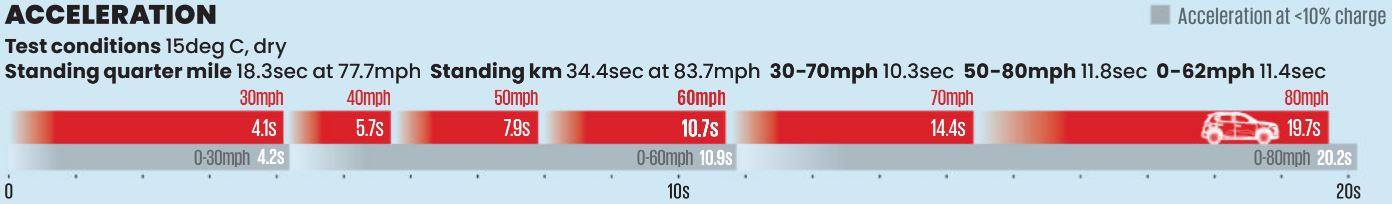
RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 198-199 miles, 3.6mpkWh (combined) **Test range** na/122/175 miles (average/touring/everyday)



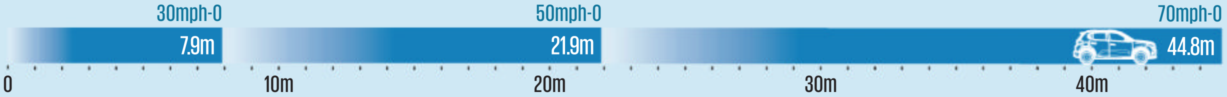
ACCELERATION

Test conditions 15deg C, dry
Standing quarter mile 18.3sec at 77.7mph **Standing km** 34.4sec at 83.7mph **30-70mph** 10.3sec **50-80mph** 11.8sec **0-62mph** 11.4sec

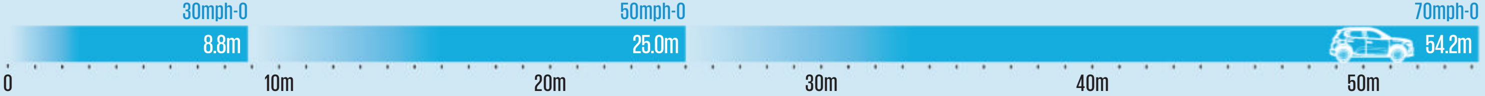


BRAKING

Dry 60-0mph 2.39sec

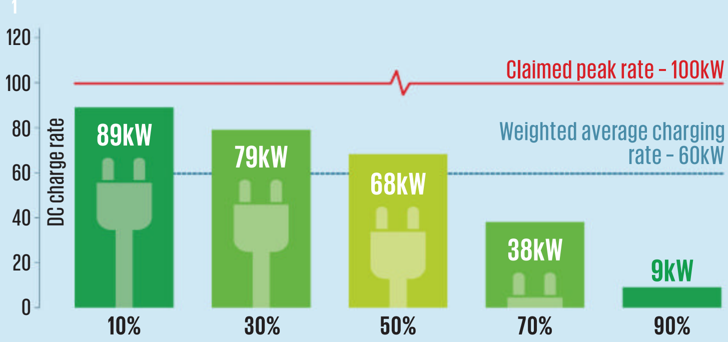


Wet 60-0mph 2.75sec



RAPID-CHARGING PERFORMANCE

Charging port location Nearside rear wing



MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

CITROEN E-C3 MAX

On-the-road price £23,795
Price as tested £24,155
Value after 3yrs/36k miles £10,675
Insurance group 24

MOTOR & BATTERY

Installation Front, transverse, FWD
Type Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 111bhp
Torque 92lb ft
Battery 44.2/43.7kWh (total/usable), LFP, 349V
Power to weight 78bhp per tonne
Torque to weight 65lb ft per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 1-spd reduction gear

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel monocoque
Weight/as tested 1416kg/1479kg
Wheels 7.5Jx17in
Tyres 205/50 R17 93V, Goodyear EfficientGrip Performance 2

SUSPENSION & STEERING

Front MacPherson struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar
Rear Torsion beam, coil springs
Steering EPAS, rack and pinion; 3.0 turns lock to lock; 10.6m turning circle
Brakes 302mm ventilated discs, single-piston floating calipers (f), 268mm solid discs, single-piston floating calipers (r)

> "The ë-C3 ends up being quite a likeable free spirit"

PETER LIDDIARD

THE SMALL PRINT Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. Running efficiency is tested on a closed test track; 'touring' is representative of UK motorway driving, 'everyday' of intra-urban driving. Acceleration, braking and cabin noise are measured on reference surfaces, for cabin noise using a handheld decibel meter. Charging equipment used for rapid-charging tests may vary, but charger power always exceeds the advertised peak draw of the test car. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission.

◄ is short for 'Cruise' – and this actually slightly reduces motor regen at higher speeds, for more comfortable motorway drivability. As a default, the car's regenerative braking is still quite mild.

All up, it may sound like a recipe that could frustrate with its lack of configurability – and yet it doesn't. The ë-C3 just gets on with it, copes with most reasonable demands, rarely annoys and, simply by avoiding complication, pretension and affectation of any kind, ends up being quite a likeable free spirit.

RIDE & HANDLING

★★★☆☆

PROS Ride comfort has its moments; grip level and body control are at least adequate
CONS Ride isolation and rebound damping are often poor

This may be a small car with a comfort-first agenda, but that doesn't make it characterless or unengaging. In fact, you could say that it succeeds in conjuring likeability more effectively than it does a truly settled, absorbent ride, at least some of the time.

The fairly gentle, low-ish-frequency riding gait works quite well on well-surfaced country roads with gentler vertical inputs, where it does have an appealing fluency. It's hard to tune settled ride comfort into such a small car but, in the right circumstances, Citroën has had at least some success in doing so.

It's a shame, needless to say, that the ë-C3's aura of comfort isn't more pervading.

At lower speeds it lacks a little ride isolation, and so the axles can thump around a bit over sharp edges and drain covers, whacking notably back down to terra firma if you take speed bumps hurriedly due to Citroën's preference for little apparent rebound damping.

The car uses the same hydraulic suspension bushing technology as its maker's bigger models so is tuned with softer springs and dampers, leaning on those hydraulic bump stops to take the sting out of bigger inputs.

But, at higher speeds especially, the approach isn't always effective. You will feel some sharper compression inputs thump through to your backside, for example, while other inputs, which better-tied-down rivals would just soak up, can cause the body to rebound, and pitch, joggle and pogo down the road just a little. Charming, perhaps, but not objectively commendable.

ASSISTED DRIVING

★★★☆☆

PROS Physical deactivation buttons are welcome; always-on systems don't irritate
CONS No option for adaptive cruise or auto regen

The active safety equipment level of the C3 and ë-C3 isn't informed by trim level. On both Plus and Max models, you get a manual cruise control/speed limiter; a basic lane departure warning system; a camera-based autonomous emergency braking system; driver monitoring; and a speed limit recognition and recommendation buzzer. If you were hoping that a simple supermini might be able to avoid any of these systems, then welcome to 2025.

The best that Citroën can do is to provide physical buttons for the deactivation of both the speed limit recognition and lane keeping systems. Otherwise, all are on whether you like it or not.

Thankfully, the driver monitoring system isn't an intrusive or troublesome one, and the AEB system isn't predisposed to risk-averse intrusion either.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★★☆

PROS Genuinely affordable; decent rapid-charging performance
CONS Not outstandingly cheap on monthly finance; real-world range

The C3 costs from around £18,000 as a pure petrol model, £20,000 as a 48V hybrid or £22,000 as an electric ë-C3. Even as an EV, then, it's very reasonable indeed.

The ë-C3's showroom price in particular is level with entry-level versions of the Renault 5, and below that of a Vauxhall Corsa Electric or a BYD Dolphin. The BYD has the edge on all of them on monthly finance, thanks to the support behind its 0% deals, though the Renault and Citroën are at least in touch, both being securable over a four-year term for less than £350 a month after a similar deposit.

The ë-C3 doesn't have a trip computer with any indication of running efficiency, so the results of our touring and everyday tests had to be based on indicated remaining battery percentage, and we couldn't generate an average.

The results we could generate suggested a real-world range of between 120 and 170 miles, depending on type of usage. That may not be brilliant – in terms of outright efficiency, it's certainly a little underwhelming for a small EV – but the ë-C3 is still likely to be competitive with key electric rivals at its particular price point.

The car also indicated respectable rapid-charging performance, with a weighted test average of 60kW (GWM Ora 03 47kW, Jeep Avenger 67kW). 🅰

VERDICT

Predictable limitations, but also plenty of usability, space and cheer for the money

★★★⯪☆

For all of its quirky, unpretentious self-possession, the ë-C3's main accomplishment is its price. But it's what Citroën offers for that price – some sophistication to the car's design, cleverness in its packaging and a driving experience that seeks to go beyond the adequate in at least some respects – that'll set it apart from other affordable small EVs.

The ë-C3 lacks the fashionable allure, outright running efficiency and finely polished drive of a Renault 5. But it's nonetheless a very creditable budget EV made in Europe, and a welcome demonstration of the art of the possible.

RIVALS

RENAULT 5 E-TECH
From £22,995
★★★★☆

2 **CITROEN E-C3**

VAUXHALL CORSA ELECTRIC
From £26,830
★★★☆☆

FIAT GRANDE PANDA ELECTRIC
From £20,920

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RICHARD LANE

Testing, testing

DACIA
LADA
DACIA
DACIA

Le Vot imposes an unorthodox way of working on Dacia's designers and engineers

You wouldn't think an electrically powered tailgate could be the topic of engrossing chatter, because 99.9% of the time it can't. But then you find yourself in a room with Denis Le Vot, and suddenly it's as if Walter Röhrl is explaining that the next Porsche 911 is going to get a V12.

Le Vot, an engineer by training, is the CEO of Dacia. He's one of those fascinating, shrewd execs who's been around the corporate block. Turkey, Russia, Belgium, the US, mostly within the Renault-Nissan universe, and with a stint as a board member at AvtoVAZ, the Soviet state-owned car maker that went private in the 1990s and was then bought by Renault before being returned to the Russian state in 2022. He has lived a life of unglamorous car-industry realpolitik, making profit where it isn't easily found. It isn't hard to see why Renault Group CEO Luca de Meo thought him a superb fit for Dacia – a brand that squeezes margin from cars until the piston rings squeak.

Le Vot loves this stuff, as I discovered on the recent Bigster launch in Provence, where we talked not about how Dacia's new SUV rides or handles (well enough) but how the hell the company can charge so little for it. The range starts at £25k, and when you consider the kit on offer, it's the same as Aston Martin offering its new Vantage for BMW M4 money. It's tough to see how some of the Bigster's rivals will survive, especially as it's reasonably easy on the eye as well as the wallet. A bloodbath seemingly awaits.

Dacia's approach is triple-pronged, beginning with modularity. Okay, no surprise there (it's the only way that any car maker short of Ferrari et al can do business today), but the Romanian brand takes it a step further than most. Save for the tiny Spring EV, all of its cars are identical up to the B-pillar. Le Vot jokes that while it took two years and 3000 engineers to turn Renault's Clio into the Sandero, it then cost £5 to turn the Sandero into the Jogger. Adapting it for Duster duties cost a little more, mainly for the reinforced sills and ride height, but from there, for the extra-large Bigster, the only major change has been to extend the A-pillars by 50mm.

> **"It cost £5 to turn the Sandero into the Jogger, jokes Le Vot"**

Every kilogram is managed, too. The reason the Bigster doesn't offer a seven-seat interior is because Dacia worked out only 25% of buyers in the segment consider them but the added weight would require strengthening for the rear axle, which would add expense across the range. Ergo the Bigster is a five-seater only, being ruthlessly focused on the main audience.

Which brings Le Vot to his second point: the importance of learning what the intended buyer really wants and then not straying beyond that kit level by so much as an additional USB-C port.

"We've been studying the Germans, I must confess," he says, smirking. The Germans are the big market for cars like the Bigster. They're also fussy, which is crucial. If our German chums 'need' something in their C-SUV, you damn well better offer it. And if they don't, nobody else will want it and you're off the procurement hook.

"If the car doesn't have AC [air-con], then it's disqualified. But if I offer, whatever, electric seats for the front passenger or AC in the seats? No need: it's not disqualifying. So we have dual-zone AC [in the Bigster], which we've never had before, and we have two-tone paint and an electric tailgate. These are the things we will offer, and if we don't, they will say 'I'm not buying'. Hundreds of people. It's complicated; new territory for us."

The final part of the equation is the supplier negotiations, where Le Vot's sojourns in hard-nosed Russia has fortified his resolve. By all accounts, this charismatic Frenchman and his accomplices in accounts are utter bastards. Le Vot says: "We define the car [at] €25k and the hybrid [at] €30k, then we split this price. It seems obvious, but most manufacturers don't do that. They design the car they want to have, then give the parts to suppliers, negotiating like hell to get the best price, but the best price is a surprise. When you expect €100, you get €110 more often than €95. You put it all together and it's 10% more than you thought. We design to cost. So we say €25k, cut [the car] into pieces [then say] this part has to be €45, and if you can't make it at €45, we don't make the part. It takes a little time, of course, but they come back and propose a solution."

An electric tailgate, then. In short, Germans insisted the Bigster needed one, so Dacia's suppliers, donning their thumbscrews, invented one at the required cost. One strut is electric, the other is hydraulic. It's cheap but it works and is strictly necessary. Inimitable Dacia in a nutshell.

What lies beneath

It's no secret that the new Explorer sits on VW architecture, but does it still feel like a Ford? **STEVE CROPLEY** is on a mission to find out

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

It was a bright, beautiful April Fool's Day. At 6.30am, a magnificent golden orb lit the eastern horizon with a brilliance we probably won't see more than a dozen times this year. The breeze was sweet and the air so clear you could practically see blades of grass on the horizon.

Despite the beleaguered state of the retail motor industry, the news feeds were already filling with car companies' traditional April Fool spoofs: a free tattoo for every new Volkswagen owner, BMW to launch an off-road version of the M2 – that sort of thing. And in Manchester, the Volkswagen ID 4 in which I was about to cross the country had turned into a Ford.

To be fair, we've known for years that Ford was basing its first all-European EVs – the Explorer and the Capri – on the VW Group's excellent and well-proven MEB platform, the same component set used to underpin the ID 3 and ID 4. This was undoubtedly a pragmatic decision, given that Ford urgently needs to do better in the European EV race. And despite a nine-month production delay, the project is turning into a modest – if not yet profitable – success.

Selfishly speaking, Ford's MEB decision didn't suit me. Outside the limits of the impartiality needed to be a fair-minded road tester, I'm a Ford fan: my grandfather was a pioneering Ford dealer in the Australian bush, we had lots of family Fords and my first new car was a Cortina 1600E. My view of Ford is that it may make everyman cars, but it also does things first – such as the life-changing Model T, the first affordable V8, unitary steel construction, MacPherson struts, the original Mustang, the GT40, the first 'computer-designed' Cortina, all those fast Escorts and much, much more.

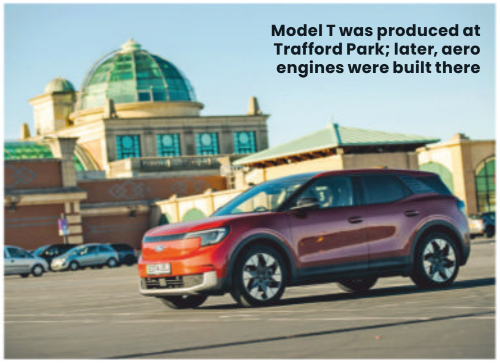
I simply didn't enjoy the notion of a me-too European Ford based on a rival manufacturer's mainstream product. Especially a Volkswagen. After all, it's not so long since the glorious, game-changing Ford Focus was forcing all comers – and most prominently Ferdinand Piëch's Mk5 VW Golf – to ride, steer and handle better to meet a much-elevated industry standard.

When James Attwood's 2025 Ford Explorer long-termer – a £50k, two-wheel-drive long-range model – arrived a few weeks ago, it became clear it was high time for me to get over myself. Especially since Attwood had pronounced it a good machine, distinct from the various VW Group models with the same underpinnings.

A workable plan seemed to be to immerse the Explorer – and myself – in as much Ford heritage

Explorer's official 354 miles and 3.4mpkWh didn't seem unduly optimistic

Blue plaque at Trafford Centre commemorates Ford's factory on the site



Model T was produced at Trafford Park; later, aero engines were built there

Explorer soon settles into the routine of humdrum UK driving

as we could find in a day, to see how well it fitted. Or how well it didn't. The simple plan was to take it on a day-long journey starting at Trafford Park, Manchester, where Henry Ford made 300,000 Model Ts for his first 20 years of British business from 1911, before moving to Dagenham in the early 1930s and turning the Manchester place over to the manufacture of Rolls-Royce Merlin aero engines during the war years.

From there, we would roll across the country to Ford's heritage centre at Daventry, to associate the Explorer with as many of its ancestors as possible under the eye of curator Len Keen. Then we'd continue south-east to Dunton, the research centre that nowadays doubles as Ford's British HQ, ending our journey beside a statue of the founder, Old Henry, erected at Dagenham in 1944 and now overlooking Dunton's main entrance. This drive would be typically British: plenty of motorway, plenty of potholes, some sinuous A- and B-roads and some recharging episodes, with all the parking and service area manoeuvring this involved.

Photographer Jack and I arrived in Manchester the night before our journey was to begin, hoping that an unsuccessful meeting with a steam-driven 22kW Geniepoint charger outside our otherwise-comfortable Trafford hotel wasn't an omen of things to follow. For no good reason it wouldn't function, which meant our journey couldn't begin with a full tank, as it were.

One thing the hotel did have, bizarrely, was a parking line of about a dozen used, obviously recently imported Yankee cars for sale via eBay. Evidently the vendor was using the hotel car park for selling. We photographed our Explorer ▸

Explorer has enough Ford magic to make the origins of its platform a moot point

It's comfortable and supple, but road noise can intrude at times

Overnight stop included chance meeting with older US-market namesake

◂ beside a US-market Explorer of a very different persuasion, wondering at Ford's tendency to spread familiar names over models of different characters and layouts.

Before departure the following morning, I rang the Geniepoint helpline to report the charger failure on behalf of other arriving hopefuls, to be greeted by a polite woman with a voice full of concern, who reset the charger there and then. I watched it click into action, but its charge rate was too slow to justify our waiting. Still, it was a good sign: even when you're talking duff chargers, EV life is getting better.

The only sign these days of Ford's former presence at Trafford Park is a blue plaque in one of the many entrance halls of the Trafford Centre, a staggeringly huge and spacious multi-storey mall of satisfyingly appropriate American influence. We found and read the plaques, then jumped back in the car and headed hot-foot for the open road, hooking up after a mile or two with the M6 motorway.

Our immediate destination, 40 miles on, was the Sandbach service area and a reassuring bank of a dozen Instavolt chargers that converted our 35% of battery capacity to 85% at a rate of 85kW in the time it took us to drink a couple of cappuccinos. It was pricey, mind, at 89p per kWh. Ford's Daventry heritage base – also a massive parts store and the site of the Henry Ford Academy where technicians further their skills – was now an easy 92 miles away.

The car was doing unobtrusively well. It turns out to be a composed cruiser with long-distance seats and sweet steering that's notably accurate at the straight-ahead and thus not tiring for longer journeys. There's not much road noise on smooth stuff but, like many German-developed cars, it gets noisy on the coarse surfaces that are much more prevalent here in the UK than they are elsewhere in Europe.

We cruised at around 70mph on the speedo (knock off 2mph for built-in error) because we soon established that at this speed, with a little care, you could turn 3.5mpkWh – the claimed WLTP figure; cruising just a shade quicker caused the figure to fall to 3.1-3.2mpkWh. You become aware of the exponential rise of aero drag with speed so much sooner in an EV than you do in a petrol car.

A slightly lower speed and consequent better consumption can add 10-15 miles to the range you get from a 50kW charge while making no important difference to your journey time (this point proved by my own assiduous observations of sat-nav arrival predictions). I was clocking such esoterics as Jack drove, proving himself expert at seeing interesting traffic ("Did you spot that new Corvette?"), which added a lot to the interest of our progress.

With miles, the Ford grew on us both. It seemed supple and comfortable, and we negated the sometime road noise by raising our voices when necessary. Neither of us was truly expert on how this chassis compared with a VW version, but our background impression (confirmed later by Attwood) was that the ride was a bit softer yet well damped and composed. This was another good Ford sign. So was the styling: I was liking the blocky, well-proportioned shape.

We stayed an hour in Daventry, mainly because Len Keen and his two technician colleagues, Chris and Andy, were so welcoming. The Ford heritage collection brilliantly combines perfect examples of ordinary models with hero cars driven by Hannu Mikkola, Roger Clark and a dozen other road and track stars. They also continue to preserve the Autocar-badged M-Sport Fiesta ST in which then staffer Chris Harris won his class in Wales Rally GB 20 years ago (which had an echo for me; I watched him do it).

Photographer Jack, compact of build, amused us with his claim to be the one bloke in our group who could perfectly fit Ford's beautiful silver GT40, the road-going model with wire wheels and three-eared knock-offs, that was sized for Walter Hayes, the legendary communications chief whose determination and strong influence with the Ford family led to the creation of the Ford DFV racing V8, surely the most successful Formula 1 engine in history.

On we drove through the afternoon towards Dunton in Essex, spearing east from Daventry on the evocative A45 that links half a dozen defunct British car factories (including Jaguar at Browns Lane and various British Leyland places south of Coventry). This road also doubled for a while as a test track for 1950s Le Mans Jaguars. One story has it that Jag founder Sir William Lyons well understood the need for fast shakedowns on weekdays, but frowned on the idea of high-speed testing on a Sunday…

As we drove, this Ford was taking hold of me. Its composure was starting to remind me of Parry-Jones-era Fords, one of which (a Mondeo) I'd driven quite a lot just a few weeks before. This felt like a European Ford, which is a compliment. In particular it was different in composure terms

Keen reacquaints Cropley with a very special Fiesta ST

“The Explorer reminded me of Parry-Jones-era Fords”

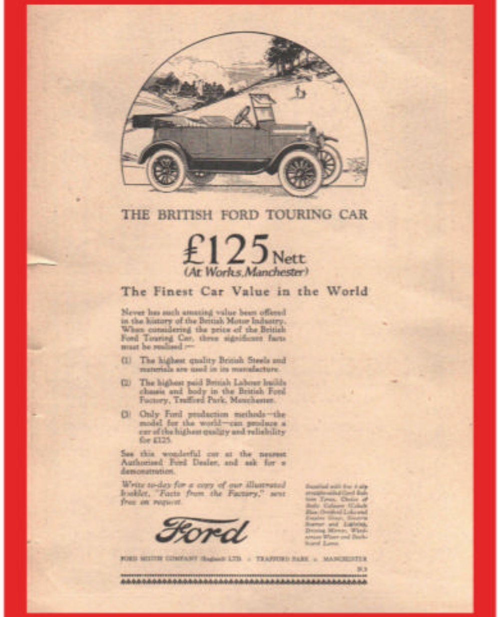
from the US-developed Ford Mustang Mach-E, whose engineers have just about managed to tame a pitching motion in steady-state cruising, after years of trying. This EV had overtones of Ford’s European golden age.

At Dunton, Henry Ford was waiting. We arrived just before knock-off time at 4pm, which means the cornering shots we did on the entrance roundabout (see above) were a bit unhelpful to the departing workforce. In all, we notched 230 miles at an average speed of 54mph, consuming power at 3.5mpkWh – a very decent performance. The car’s economy and its real-world range were honest figures, in line with the maker’s claims. Best of all it felt and looked like a Ford, and not a Volkswagen. In one enjoyable day, the ghosts were laid to rest. 🅰

Ford of Britain HQ at Dunton marks a fitting end point to the journey

Heritage collection in Daventry is nirvana for fans of the Blue Oval

FORD: MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN



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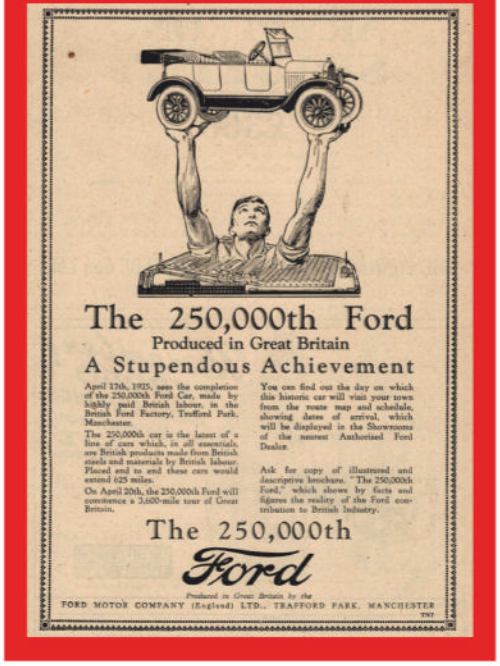
The following month, Ford took out an ad to celebrate the 250,000th car to roll off the Trafford Park production line, labelling it as “a stupendous achievement”. It again highlighted just how British the car was – a reminder in this age of tariffs that national pride was a key factor 100 years ago.



The 250,000th Ford
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A Stupendous Achievement

April 17th, 1925, sees the completion of the 250,000th Ford Car, made by highly paid British labour, in the British Ford Factory, Trafford Park, Manchester.

The 250,000th car is the latest of a line of cars which, in all essentials, are British products made from British steels and materials by British labour. Placed end to end these cars would extend 625 miles.

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Wake me up before you Yo-Go...

London's pay-as-you-go personal transport mix has got a new player in the form of Yo-Go's electric golf buggies. **JOHN EVANS** goes for a spin

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

Bus, bike and underground are just three of the ways you can travel around London – and now there's another: golf cart. There are currently 10 of the yellow electric buggies, operated by Yo-Go and scurrying around Hammersmith and Fulham, as part of a trial launched in September 2024. The idea sounds bonkers, but once you've driven one, it soon makes sense.

Each buggy can carry two people plus their luggage. They're restricted to the prevailing speed limit of 20mph, but because they're partially open to the elements, they feel faster. They can be driven by anyone aged between 25 and 70 who has held a UK driving licence for more than two years. The hire charge – 10p per minute for subscribers paying a £10 monthly fee, or 20p a minute for non-subscribers – includes insurance with a £250 excess. When the vehicle is parked, the hire charge falls to 5p per minute. These rates make the buggies cheaper to use than a Lime e-bike or Zipcar Flex.

To drive a Yo-Go buggy you need to have registered as a user by submitting your licence and payment details, national insurance number and postcode. Approval takes 24 hours. You will find the vehicles (there are plans to increase the currently small fleet to 70) in dedicated parking bays dotted around Hammersmith and Fulham. Find one, scan the QR code on the side of it or select the vehicle on the

Yo-Go plans to expand its fleet of buggies to 70 following successful trials

Yo-Go app to unlock it (just like a car, each buggy has a registration number) and your hire session begins, ending only when you return the vehicle to the parking bay. Future plans include allowing users to park them where they choose, perhaps on their street, meaning that a buggy would be available for a group of households. In Hammersmith and Fulham the buggies enjoy free parking, but elsewhere parking becomes chargeable.

The brains behind the Yo-Go buggies is Samuel Bailey. The automotive engineer wanted to give Londoners an alternative to the expensive electric car and found the answer in China, where the buggies are built by a company called Marshell. Each has a small 5kWh battery powering a 4kW electric motor and giving a range of 30 miles. Charging is via London's lamp-post network or a roof-mounted solar panel, which, after a day's sunshine, can provide a six-mile top-up. However, for all its clever electronics, a Yo-Go buggy is still a golf cart, right? In fact, the vehicle is homologated for UK roads, so it's now classified as an L6e quadricycle. Its body has been redesigned, too, to make it more practical and weatherproof.

Even so, my fear of being the laughing stock of the capital's road users is not helped by the sight of my test buggy awaiting me at Yo-Go's Parsons Green parking spot. The small vehicle looks only a couple of rungs up the evolutionary ladder from the rickshaws that clog London's West End. And what city needs yet another electric 'personal mobility' solution? My scepticism isn't helped by the buggy's questionable weather protection, its basic plastic interior (although the two seats look comfortable) and its twin rear-mounted boots, which can't be locked. At least the foot pedals marked 'Stop' and 'Go' appear to be foolproof and, save for indicators and a windscreen wiper, there are few extras to distract the inexperienced driver. Driving the buggy is just a case of 'unlocking' it, belting up, selecting D for drive and pressing the Go pedal.

"The buggy surges forward effortlessly"

Thanks to its low weight, the buggy surges forward effortlessly; helped by fairly aggressive brake regen, it stops easily too. Independent front suspension absorbs the worst of the area's battered roads, and although the buggy is narrow, its track is just wide enough to clear speed cushions. Its 'chunky wheel at each corner' design means the buggy can turn on a sixpence, while its low centre of gravity keeps it from rolling excessively in tight corners. It's fun to drive, aided by excellent visibility. To my relief, it attracts positive reactions from drivers and pedestrians. In fact, the nimble, space-efficient and environmentally friendly buggy seems the natural choice compared with the large, heavy cars jostling for space around it.

"Users love them," says Bailey. "Each of the 10 buggies is booked out around three times a day, and we have around 5000 registered users. They include everyone from parents doing the school run and carers visiting patients to builders who take public transport and use the buggy to collect materials."

On the question of buggies one day being abandoned like e-cycles, Bailey says the fact that they're registered to the user will prevent that. He's confident the security tech he's designed and installed will make them theft-proof too, although that's what mighty JLR used to say about its security…

Meanwhile, with little weather protection available, he urges users to dress appropriately. Only time will tell whether his Yo-Go buggies are a solution to a problem or just another piece of city clutter, but on the strength of Autocar's drive, they deserve a chance. A

Pedals come with useful instructions

Road warrior Evans revels in the buggy's nimble usability

HOW DOES YO-GO COMPARE?

For a 20-minute journey without stops in London, a Yo-Go buggy* costs subscribers £2 and non-subscribers £4, compared with…

Lime e-bike £6.40

Zipcar Flex £6.40

Santander e-cycle £3.30

Tube £2.10

Bus £1.80

Santander cycle £1.65

*Buggy must be returned to 'home' bay

GETTY IMAGES

Scout's honour

The Scout name that once appeared on a line of pioneering American pick-up trucks is being revived as a VW Group-backed maker of off-road EVs. **JAMES ATTWOOD** investigates

It would be easy to dismiss Scout Motors as yet another retro revival, a way of trying to attach some emotion to new electric vehicles by sticking a nostalgic logo on the bonnet. Or even as just another new Volkswagen Group sub-brand designed to protect the conglomerate's share in the tough North American market.

Dig beneath the surface, though, and Scout is far more interesting – even if it isn't a brand too well known to UK readers, and one that, for now, won't be sold here. For one thing, what's not to love about a retro-styled Jeep Wrangler rival? For another, the unusual set-up of Scout could have a significant influence on the future development processes of one of the world's biggest car firms.

Scout Motors isn't technically a Volkswagen Group brand: it's an independent stand-alone company based in the US but owned by the VW Group. While Scott Keogh, boss of Volkswagen USA, also serves as CEO of Scout, it otherwise has its own staff and facilities. It is, in effect, a start-up created purely to make a new line of highly capable off-road EVs.

"The intent is to combine an American start-up – speed, innovation, ingenuity, adaptability – with the backing, scale and money of one of the world's leading manufacturers," explains Ryan Decker, Scout's strategy boss (and employee number one). "Nobody has really done that before."

But this is an electric vehicle start-up housed in some nostalgic wrapping. A quick history lesson may be in order first because, despite its name, the original International Scout was very much an American machine. It was developed by International Harvester, a longtime US manufacturer of agricultural and construction vehicles that in the early 1900s expanded into light trucks and pick-ups.

With the Jeep CJ gaining popularity in the 1950s, the Indiana firm decided to develop its own four-wheel-drive recreational vehicle. The Scout 80 arrived in 1961 and was sold in various forms across two model generations until 1980 (see box, p54). Even if the name isn't that familiar, chances are the model's styling would offer a familiar ring of Americana.

International Harvester slipped into decline in the 1980s, with its various divisions sold off. The truck and engine division was eventually rebranded as Navistar, and in 2021 it was bought by Traton, the VW Group's heavy commercial vehicle arm. That also gave VW the rights to the Scout model name.

Here's where it comes full circle: Volkswagen USA spotted the incredible popularity of the Jeep Wrangler and retro-infused off-roaders such as the revived Ford Bronco, and it wanted a piece of the action. So in 2022 it decided to create its own start-up to produce one – and it just so happened the company now owned a brand with its own rich heritage.

"To be a start-up, but to have the heritage and legacy of a really cool brand that has a passionate fanbase and can evoke nostalgic memories, is really unusual," says Decker. And while it's been 45 years since a Scout last rolled off the production line, he insists the name is still known to US buyers. "Some guy came up ▸

> **"Scout is an electric vehicle start-up housed in nostalgic wrapping"**

Terra pick-up concept offers up to 1000lb ft and a 500-mile range in range-extender form

Software-defined Terra will benefit from extensive over-the-air updates

A practical load bay is any honest pick-up truck's raison d'être

◂ to me earlier today and told me his grandfather had a Scout they used to go on fishing trips in," continues Decker. "Having that as your starting place to build a brand from, how special is that?"

Last year Scout revealed two concept models: the Terra pick-up and the Traveler SUV (named after old Scout variants). Few details have yet been divulged, but there's talk of 1000lb ft and 350 miles of range, rising to 500 miles for the range-extender, and 0-60mph times under 3.5sec.

This is where Scout really diverges from VW Group models: they won't be built on a shared EV architecture, such as the now well-established MEB. Instead, if you want to offer genuine off-road ability with the chops to take on a Wrangler on the trails, you will need a ladder-on-frame chassis – and, as Scout technical chief Burkhard Huhnke notes, "there's no body-on-frame platform in the entire Volkswagen Group – so we have to start from scratch".

Huhnke's appointment as technical boss encapsulates Scout's ethos: he has spent much of his career at the Volkswagen Group but was most recently technical chief at the now-defunct EV start-up Fisker. The brief he was given was simple, he says: "The target is to become the benchmark in the off-road segment."

To do that, the new Scout vehicles won't just be styled like the original. "The Scout was a working horse in the past," says Huhnke. "It was the eight-days-a-week vehicle that could go off road but you could also do your daily business in.

"Off-road capability means it needs to be very different. It's very simple: I get targets from an engineering perspective. We're focused on ability, on approach angles, the torque, weight distribution, everything. We're working on an e-beam and a special axle design. We have 35in wheels. You have to have the sway bar disconnect. But we can combine the tradition of an off-road car with the innovations of an electric vehicle, and we can see a real sweet spot."

Scout vehicles will be offered with electric or range-extender powertrains. They will be 'software-defined vehicles', designed around advanced computer systems that allow for over-the-air updates and the like. Huhnke describes it as "heritage combined with innovation".

That innovation will be seen in both the pure-electric powertrain and the range-extender variant that Scout is working on. Huhnke is proud that the latter – which drives the wheels with an electric motor but features a small combustion engine used to charge the battery – is the firm's own development and intellectual property. He says: "We're not a guinea pig for the Volkswagen Group to try this out; it's where we see our biggest opportunity."

The original Scout platform was used for the Monteverdi Safari, a short-lived Swiss-built Range Rover rival that was launched in 1977.

It's about that go-anywhere, off-road brief, and providing functionality in remote places where EV charging infrastructure might not be the best. "We are customer-centric and listen to their concerns," adds Huhnke. "People loved the concept and the BEV platform, but the feedback led us to a range-extender. It's like carrying a charging station with you."

Huhnke is also excited by the potential that an electric vehicle powertrain, with its instant power, torque vectoring and even weight distribution, has for an off-roader.

Software development will also be key, and it's notable Huhnke started his automotive career in software and electronics. For that side, the

Decker wants to nurture existing Scout fans as well as create new ones

Scout report: a brief history

The International Harvester (IH) Scout project began in 1958. The Scout 80 compact pick-up was launched in November 1960 and offered with two- and four-wheel drive, a 93bhp slant four engine and Cab-Top and Travel-Top bodies. There was a front bench for three but no rear seats due to a permanent bulkhead.

Early development focused on improving its station wagon credentials, and rear seats were added by 1963. By the following year, IH had sold 100,000 examples.

The updated Scout 800 followed in 1966, by which time the machine's success had inspired rivals such as the Ford Bronco. That model's V8 prompted development of what became the Scout II, launched in 1971. It offered a range of powertrains, improved ride and an array of new styling and comfort options. It also spawned a range of variants, including the Baja 1000-inspired SSII (Super Scout II).

Further updates were planned for 1980, but with IH suffering financial troubles and in a dispute with unions, the firm chose to sell off the Scout division. When it couldn't find a buyer, it simply shut the brand down.

Scout's retro off-road rivals

JEEP RECON
Before an EV version of the Wrangler arrives, the firm's first true go-anywhere electric offering will be the new Recon. Expect 600bhp, a range of close to 400 miles and plenty of video of it crushing the Rubicon Trail.

GMC HUMMER
It takes some effort to make a zero-emission EV that's brasher and more outrageous than the original line of military-inspired vehicles, but here we are. This behemoth packs 1000bhp and a battery that weighs more than a Ford Focus.

MERCEDES-BENZ G580 EQ TECHNOLOGY
At £180k it costs just a bit more than a Scout will, but the G580 will mix retro styling with incredible ability thanks to a 579bhp quad-motor powertrain and a ladder-on-frame chassis. Perfect for Kensington's speed bumps.

VW Group's recent tie-up with software-focused EV firm Rivian will be a major boost. The joint venture between the two companies is centred on the development of a new zonal software architecture, and Huhnke says that "Scout will be one of the first brands" in the VW Group empire to use it: "It will be the most modern architecture, so we'll have full connectivity to the cloud for diagnostics, predictive maintenance and new functions to keep the car fresh."

While Scout has shown concepts of its first two models, production versions are unlikely to appear until 2027 or 2028. Before then, the firm needs to finish development, while construction is also under way on a dedicated US factory in Georgia. Needless to say, not many automotive start-ups can invest in a vast $2 billion (£1.6bn) facility that could employ around 4000 people and produce 200,000 vehicles a year.

Aside from the need to finish building that factory, it's a rapid cycle for a new start-up to launch products in, especially given the huge technical demands on off-roaders. "Being a start-up means we can focus," says Huhnke, "and we are laser-focused on two products.

"I don't want to judge traditional car manufacturers, but we can focus on our first bullets without distraction. And by using digital technology and digital twins [testing simulated versions of cars], we can speed up the process."

Conversely, unlike some start-ups with a limited pool of investment, Scout has the luxury of time. Huhnke adds: "Sometimes you can see start-ups that have to push the product because of cash flow, but we can take time to get it right before it goes to the customer. We can do full-speed development and testing now and really work on the architecture and ability."

Scout won't just work on the models for the next few years, though: there's also a brand to build. Decker describes that process as "building a community", adding: "We want to nurture existing Scout fans out there. But we want to make new fans as well."

While he won't be drawn on reservations to date, Decker says the firm is "happy with where we are" – with the Traveler SUV making up the bulk of buyer interest. He says the focus is on ensuring an ongoing dialogue with the people who have signed up, adding: "We won't treat them like a marketing database."

Similarly, Decker won't give specifics about any sales or growth ambitions for Scout, but he notes "the two products we'll launch will cover more than 40% of the US market in terms of revenue and profit pools". Pricing is expected to start from around $50,000 (£40,000).

But beyond a new Jeep rival for the US market, what about that bigger picture? While both Huhnke and Decker insist Scout was conceived purely to fill a business opportunity, its unique set-up and technology could provide lessons and hardware for its Volkswagen parent.

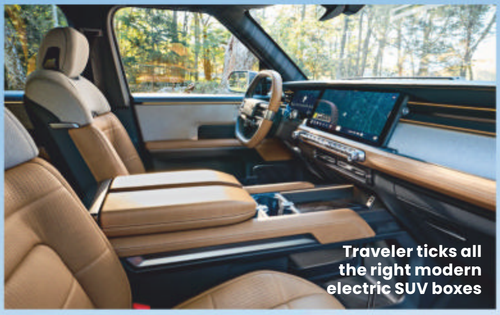
"You never get money for free," laughs Huhnke. "Efficiency is key. I've taken the challenge to become a benchmark R&D organisation in the world, from a size and cost perspective. That is an interesting challenge appreciated by our sponsors as well. Of course, we are under observation."

There are already reports that both Volkswagen and Audi are interested in Scout's platform for their own off-roaders, along with hints that the new Scout factory could be used to produce models for other brands while the marque is ramped up.

It's certainly an intriguing prospect, and Scout is worth watching because of how unusual it is as a start-up backed by a global car giant.

"You have a bunch of incumbent firms that are 100-plus years old with millions of loyal customers, but they also have a lot of complexity with lots of cars, powertrains and factories," says Decker. "Complexity is a challenge to growing a business. On the other hand, you have pure-play start-ups, who can react quicker, but they bring lots of questions. Will they have success? Will they go bankrupt? Can they service your car?

"If you can take the scale offered by an incumbent and mix it with the enthusiasm of a start-up, think what a superpower that is." 🅰



Traveler ticks all the right modern electric SUV boxes

Traveler SUV has attracted the most buyer interest so far. It will cost from about £40,000

LIVING WITH A...

Where our long-term test cars have been and what they've done

“It's starting to become a lifestyle vehicle as much as a working one”

FINAL REPORT **MILEAGE 18,468**

INEOS GRENADIER

Endearingly utilitarian, luxury-eschewing off-roader signs off

WHY WE RAN IT To find out if the spirit of the classic Land Rover Defender really does live on here

The Grenadier has returned to its maker, and I'm quite sad about it. It arrived in January with around 10,000 miles and has gone back three months later with almost 18,500 miles to its name, so it has been used thoroughly and extensively in that time.

It was a 3.0-litre petrol (there's a 3.0 diesel too, both BMW engines) in Fieldmaster specification, kind of the more country lifestyle-oriented variant of three Station Wagon flavours – the other two being a base model and the ruggedly optioned Trialmaster, which is the same price as this, at £76,140 at the time of arrival and £78,885 now.

This model was given some of the technical options of the Trialmaster in order to hone its off-road performance, such as a Rough Pack, which means locking front and rear differentials (a centre one is standard) and BF Goodrich tyres.

Our first taste of this particular car was off road, in January's 4x4 mega-test, where it held its own against a Toyota Land Cruiser and a Land Rover Defender. But it was noted that it was not the world's most refined road car: getting it to stay with us for a while to see what it was like as a long-term road-going prospect was one reason we wanted it on our fleet.

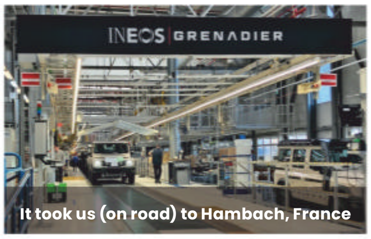
It's a slightly divisive car. A couple of testers tried it and didn't really gel with it; others drove it and rather fell for it. As did I.

As a reminder, the idea for the Grenadier came from Ineos founder Jim Ratcliffe's disappointment that Land Rover wasn't going to replace the old Defender with a car in the same vein: something utilitarian first and foremost. It's a market that Land Rover felt had left it behind: if you want a separate-chassis utility 4x4, Toyota sells around half a million Hiluxes a year and they start at £42k. So Land Rover went for premium instead.

For all the ruggedness of the Grenadier, Ineos has also begun to add some of that market to its ambitions. On the utility front, on a recent trip to the factory they had on display some examples bought by fire departments and France's rapid-response anti-terror police; there is also the Quartermaster pick-up, along with the commercial variants. A portal axle option, raising the ride height further, has just become available. Ineos's Arcane Works division, which does more bespoke finishes, and a '1924' special edition have been added to the portfolio, too. This is starting to

SECOND OPINION

The Ineos is a 'love or hate' car. I don't like the steering or the interior, and on our off-road test I was more impressed by the other cars' clever traction control. But I also love Caterhams, and they too are compromised for the sake of involvement and authenticity. I get the Grenadier – it's just not meant for me. **IV**



It took us (on road) to Hambach, France

It's not exactly refined, but the Ineos is easy to live with on a daily basis

Optional Rough Pack adds to the Grenadier's off-road abilities

Putting the boot in: spare wheel storage box comes in handy

TEST DATA

INEOS GRENADIER 3.0 T FIELDMASTER

MILEAGE

At start 10,690
At end 18,468

PRICES

List price new £76,140
List price now £78,885
Price as tested £88,917

OPTIONS

Winch £3515, Rough Pack (diff locks, BF Goodrich tyres) £2370, 18in alloy wheels £1690, high load auxiliary switch panel £1170, metallic paint £1060, side runners £958, tow ball £630, privacy glass £455, exterior utility belt £420, lockable storage box £290, interior utility rails £160, tie-down rings £59

ECONOMY AND RANGE

Claimed economy 18.9-19.6mpg
Fuel tank 90 litres
Test average 21.7mpg
Test best 22.1mpg
Test worst 17.8mpg
Real-world range 430 miles

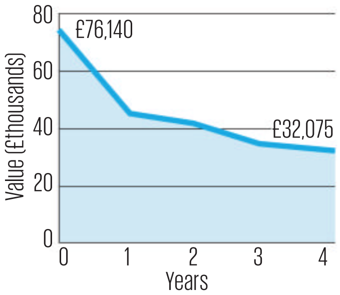
TECH HIGHLIGHTS

0-62mph 8.6sec
Top speed 99mph
Engine 6 cyls in line, 2998cc, turbocharged, petrol
Max power 285bhp at 4750rpm
Max torque 332lb ft at 1750-4000rpm
Gearbox 8-spd automatic, 4WD
Boot 1152-2035 litres
Wheels 8.5Jx18in, alloy
Tyres 255/70 R18, BF Goodrich All-Terrain KO2
Kerb weight 2741kg

SERVICE AND RUNNING COSTS

Contract hire rate £676 pcm (commercial variant £599 pcm)
CO_2 325-336g/km
Service costs None
Other costs Tyre repair £25
Fuel costs £2143
Running costs including fuel £2168
Cost per mile 28 pence
Faults Sticky door button, hot and cold HVAC

DEPRECIATION



PREVIOUS REPORTS

26 Feb, 12 Mar, 19 Mar, 2 Apr, 9 Apr, 23 Apr

become a lifestyle vehicle – as much as a working one – because people value authenticity.

They perhaps value it more than traditional luxury; I imagine a Grenadier can only feel so luxurious. But I found it refined enough, with the caveats made before about the enormous turning circle and heavy, unkeen-to-self-centre steering. Get used to those and it's easy to rub along with.

We should – must – talk drawbacks. It's hard to get a full grasp of ownership when a car arrives for three months and departs having needed no servicing and no contact with the network, and when nothing needs rectifying. So I'm grateful to some owners who've written, and who've pointed me at owners' forums.

There were a few niggles with our car that seem common. The door handle buttons could be sticky in winter (regular use, or warmer weather, sorts them out). Some owners find issues with the ventilation: this car preferred to blow very warm or very cold, but wasn't brilliantly responsive in between (fortunately, with a low fan speed those are my two preferred states for HVAC anyway). Some owners don't like the footwell intrusion on right-hand-drive cars. There are "annoyances, not catastrophes", as some put it, like it's v1.0 of a car that could do with being at least v1.1. But what also seems to be true is that big things don't go wrong.

Of more concern to many owners – and this isn't a UK-specific issue – is a shortage of dealers and repairers, which is a difficult situation for a new, still low-volume car maker: too many outlets and they won't each look after enough cars to make money. Too few and customers will decide it's too far. To some, aftersales feels stretched.

Ineos recently entered its 50th global market, but that expansion is slowing so it can consolidate its existing positions. Part of that clearly needs to be a broadening of the network. Then again, let's not pretend that other, bigger, car makers always get that right.

Being a petrol model it drank fuel at an immoderate rate of 21.7mpg, but apart from that, and a £25 tyre repair for which it can't be blamed, it didn't incur any costs or need looking at. Depreciation seems to be par for the big 4x4 course.

Should you buy one? I've had emails from owners advising it both ways. But the messages tend to say: "I love the car..." So did I. And whether you're trying to sell to business users or enthusiasts, that seems like the right place to start.

MATT PRIOR

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE
matthew.prior@haymarket.com

LOVE IT

4x4 ABILITY
Goes wherever you would want it to. Only its weight and turning circle hold it back.

BUTTONS
Loads of lovely straightforward buttons. And it talked to my phone every single time I plugged it in.

COMFORT
The footwell intrusion bothers some, but I still think this is a good, relaxed driving position with great visibility.

LOATHE IT

TURNING CIRCLE
The Ineos tows very nicely, but its vast turning circle is a real disadvantage when backing up a trailer.

SWIRLING DERVISH
In bad weather, aero swirls seem to make the mirrors and side windows dirty much more quickly than ordinarily happens on most cars.

SUZUKI SWIFT

Want to have B-road fun but can't afford a Porsche 911 GT3? Step this way

MILEAGE 6758
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To see if this latest incarnation has maintained that trademark no-frills appeal

It's safe to say the Swift has earned the affections of much of the Autocar office in a way very few cars recently have. I haven't been so inundated with people wanting a go in my long-termer since I ran a Toyota Corolla Commercial, when it seemed 75% of my colleagues were moving house.

The last time you saw my Swift, it was actually a different, Motion-spec car. That was involved in an unfortunate incident with a high kerb, necessitating its replacement by the Ultra model you see here, with its black-painted roof, diamond-cut alloy wheels and – gasp! – automatic climate control.

Anyway, the change of spec hasn't diminished the Swift's wonderful about-town ability.

LOVE IT

MANUAL FOR HAPPINESS

The five-speed gearbox has one of the greatest shifts in any car over the past five years and the pedals are well laid out for heel-and-toeing.

LOATHE IT

GLACIAL DRIFT

There's no escaping that 12.5sec 0-62mph time. Overtaking anything isn't for the faint of heart.

Few other new cars offer such lightness and manoeuvrability

Its combination of compact dimensions, outstanding visibility and impressive manoeuvrability makes me wonder why anyone would ever want to drive anything else in a world filled with tiny parking spaces, awkward junctions and an ever-increasing number of people in massive SUVs who can't handle the size of their own car.

I was genuinely taken aback when I managed to spin it around in a one-and-a-half-lane road in a single fluid movement the other day. That's what a 4.8m turning radius gets you, I suppose.

As great as it is around town, there's another seemingly unlikely place where it excels: on a Great British country road. You know the kind I mean: a flowing B-road that winds its way through the scenery, filled with sharp corners and blind crests. In other words, the sort of road you would drive down and think 'phwoar, they could run a rally down here'.

I can think of very few cars on sale that are more fun down such a route than the plucky little Swift. Sure, perhaps part of the reason for that is there are so few cars like it on sale any more. As I've noted before, there are now just seven cars on sale that weigh less than a tonne, excluding lightweight specials such as Caterhams, so anything this light will naturally feel a bit out of the ordinary in the sanitised times we live in.

Suzuki's Heartect platform, devised for the previous Swift of 2016, is highly competent. It isn't the stiffest, but that's a good thing to my mind, because otherwise the Swift could have become too firm for Britain's battered roads. As things stand, it strikes a pleasing balance between comfort and fun, feeling lively enough on a spirited drive but not rattling my teeth out on a cruise.

It's well damped, with a fantastic primary ride that really flattens out the road without robbing it of agility. There was always going to be plenty of that, of course, with such squat dimensions and a wheel effectively on each corner. The turn-in response, aided by communicative steering that's reassuringly weighty at speed, is genuinely impressive.

However, it must be said that the eco-spec Yokohoma tyres are not, running out of grip well before they ought to. Pair this with the understeer bias present in pretty much every supermini you can think of and the Swift's limits are a bit closer than you would hope for on a wet road.

Still, it really is a joy to thread along a snaking back lane. There's a saying that it's far more fun to drive a slow car quickly than a fast car slowly, and that certainly rings true with this.

Its thrummy little atmo three-pot has an unexpectedly guttural rawness to it, really encouraging you to take it all the way up to the redline – something you have to do anyway with just 82bhp on tap and peak power not coming in until 5700rpm – and the smooth shift at the end just keeps the fun going.

Best of all? You can rag it as hard as you like and you will still achieve more than 50mpg. Let's see your Porsche 911 GT3 do that. Or get through a width restriction.

JACK HARRISON

TEST DATA

SUZUKI SWIFT 1.2 MILD HYBRID ULTRA

Price new £20,799 **Price as tested** £21,649 **Options** Burning Red and Super Black paint £850 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 57.7mpg **Last seen** 2.4.25

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE
jack.harrison@haymarket.com

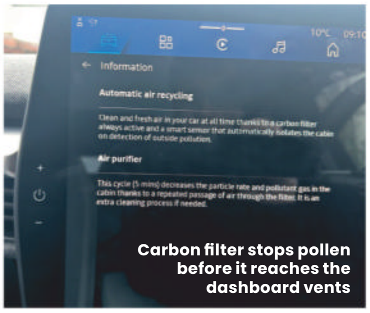
Swift is great in town but loves to stretch its legs. Just be wary of overtakes

RENAULT SCENIC

This EV has suffered hiccups but prevented sneezes

MILEAGE 5001
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To see if the 2024 Car of the Year really is the standout family SUV

There's extra storage beneath the boot floor to stow that cable away



Automatic air recycling

Clean and fresh air in your car at all time thanks to a carbon filter always active and a smart sensor that automatically isolates the cabin on detection of outside pollution.

Air purifier

This cycle (5 mins) decreases the particle rate and pollutant gas in the cabin thanks to a repeated passage of air through the filter. It is an extra cleaning process if needed.

Carbon filter stops pollen before it reaches the dashboard vents

Recently I got talking to a software engineer whose job it was to pore over the data showing how many features and options customers actually use within their cars. It won't surprise you to learn that most people don't use most things and, beyond an early exploration of some key functions and preference settings, a lot of things stay hidden away undiscovered.

The life of a motoring journalist involves exploration of all these different menus and features, yet even weeks and months into a test like this, things can come as a surprise. In the Scenic, I went hunting for a creep function for the transmission and came away with a cure for my hay fever.

Regarding the former, I had found low-speed manoeuvring, particularly parallel parking, very tricky to do, as the surge of torque jolts you forward and backwards without any finesse.

I thought this was because the car was being held by an auto-hold function, so I went hunting for an off switch, but instead, because the regenerative braking was set to maximum, it held the car in a similar way. Pulling the steering wheel paddles that control this to turn the regen down at stationary had the car creeping forward in a much more controllable manner. Problem solved.

The Scenic is unusual in keeping the regen setting how you left it when you last got out of the car, rather than resetting, like in Volkswagen Group and Hyundai Group EVs. To be fair, the Renault way is the more desirable way of doing it, as in those other brands' cars you typically only notice the absence of regen slowing you down as you approach your first corner.

If an auto hold function was in the system somewhere, I couldn't find it amid all those menus. Google solved the problem for me anyway, pointing me to a post on the Scenic owners' page – and at the very top of that was a post about hay fever.

Someone had highlighted the 'air purifier' function in the car as the pollen count skyrocketed during the early-April heatwave. I'd already noticed how surprisingly unaffected I'd been by hay fever at this time in the morning, when it normally flares up. It turned out the Scenic's cabin air filter is always on, although you can run a five-minute cleaning cycle through one of the menus ('Air quality'). It clearly works, because on the mornings when I've commuted in other cars, my hay fever has returned.

In the recent one-year service that was done by Renault UK when the Scenic went back home to have its software glitches looked at (the service intervals are one year or 18,000 miles, but our Scenic was registered a year ago and used for other purposes for the first couple of months of its life), the air filter was the only thing to be replaced.

Renault UK serviced the car as it was with them anyway, otherwise my local dealer, Martin's Renault in Reading, would have got a visit. They look after the Clio I bought new from there in 2023, and the first service I took it in for in December was as smooth and easy a process as buying the car itself. Friendly, helpful people. I have no reason to believe a visit with the Scenic would have had a different outcome.

MARK TISSHAW

LOVE IT

STORAGE BENEATH
Lift the boot floor cover and a huge space emerges. Perfect for loading golf clubs upright.

LOATHE IT

HARD TO KEEP CLEAN
All those sharp angles attract road grime – a complaint I often see made on the Scenic owners' page.

TEST DATA

RENAULT SCENIC E-TECH LONG RANGE ICONIC
Price new £45,495 **Price as tested** £46,745 **Faults** Apple CarPlay glitch **Expenses** None **Range** 299 miles **Economy** 3.4mpkWh **Last seen** 16.4.25

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE
mark.tisshaw@haymarket.com

SNAPSHOTS

BENTLEY BENTAYGA

Mileage 16,100 **Last seen** 16.4.25
Plenty of people don't let me out at junctions in this somewhat loud Bentayga, despite my best efforts to be a model driving citizen, but sometimes it goes the other way. Sitting in very slow-moving suburban traffic, there was a beep. I looked up and coming the other way was a man in a yellow Mercedes Sprinter van pointing at the car and giving me a thumbs-up. Isn't it nice to be nice? **RB**

JEEP WRANGLER

Mileage 16,090 **Last seen** 23.4.25
I'm getting better at saving fuel in the Wrangler. At first I was getting figures south of 25mpg, not least because it has a surprisingly pokey engine that I'm inclined to use. But if I simply ease my cruising speed a bit, going for a true 65mph (68 on the speedo) instead of a true 70mph (73), I can get 28mpg. This feels a bit more responsible and extends the cruising range by 30 miles per tank. **SC**

TESLA MODEL 3

Mileage 40,452 **Last seen** 23.4.25
A major criticism of EVs is the tedium of charging. Tesla has banished this with apps offering streaming services and various arcade games. Best is Beach Buggy 2 (presuming you're not bored of driving), which puts you in a caricature of your Tesla (in the right colour) for a race in which you control the car using the steering wheel and brake pedal. Brilliant. **AC**

USED CARS

HOW TO BUY A BMW 3 SERIES TOURING

GENERATIONAL TALENT

The seventh-generation 3 Series estate was and still is a star player

BMW's 3 Series Touring has been a front-runner in the executive estate car class for 40 years now, having been progressively improved across seven generations.

You could spend a good chunk of cash on a nearly new 'G81' example, but why not save yourself around £10,000 by buying an older 'F31' that's very nearly as talented?

Launched in 2012, this particular 3 Series immediately outclassed many desirable alternatives like the Audi A4 Avant and Mercedes-Benz C-Class for comfort, refinement, equipment and space – but what really set it apart was its chassis tuning and suspension, which made the car as rewarding and engaging to drive as the saloon.

"The handling is agile and sure-footed," we said when we first drove it, "and it has just the right amount of roll, pitch and dive to remind you that you're testing the chassis."

If you can, spring for a 3 Series fitted with adaptive dampers: they allow you to adjust the firmness of the suspension and can turn the car from genuine performance estate to comfortable cruiser at the touch of a button. And if you want even more grip, and greater usability in wintry conditions, then opt for a four-wheel-drive xDrive car.

There's a broad and brilliant range of models to choose from. The clear standout is the 320d, with a 184bhp four-cylinder diesel engine that's smooth and will return 42mpg day to day or an impressive 56mpg on longer journeys.

You can snap one of these up for as little as £2500, but this will tie you to a moon-mileage car with clear

Well-appointed analogue cabin does get a small, dial-controlled screen

What we said then

21 NOVEMBER 2012

"The keen-eyed among you might realise that the 330d Touring scores half a star less than the 320d saloon we road tested earlier this year. It was tempting to dish out another full-mark ranking, because the 330d is a more pleasurable car to drive than a 320d in every way. That penalty is what seems like the necessity to increase the list price to well above £40,000 to get the optimum driving experience."

signs of hard use. Stretch to around £7000-£10,000 and you will get a much tidier example.

Our top choice, though, would be the brawny and characterful 330d, which gets a punchier six-cylinder oil-burner that makes 254bhp and 413lb ft of torque. It's a crackerjack engine and suits the car well, and it will still do 53mpg on motorway schleps. You will need more than £10,000 for a decent example, though.

There are several petrols to choose from, but we would aim for either the 320i if you're after the best economy or the slightly thirsty, 242bhp 328i if you want potency.

Classified adverts with 'LCI' in the headline refer to the 'Life Cycle Impulse' (which normal people would call a facelift), rolled out to the car in 2015, bringing a new look and LED headlights.

BMW also added the ultra-frugal 320d Efficient Dynamics model to the range – a tempting choice when you consider its real-world 60mpg economy, and it's tax-exempt too.

Also new was the 340i, which feels like a pseudo-M3 to drive. Its 322bhp turbocharged petrol straight six is a smooth, elastic and flexible engine that provides serious pace – and it will still do upwards of 35mpg, whereas the Jaguar XE S, say, will struggle to return 30mpg.

Upgrades were also made to the interior, but whether you opt for an early or late example, all versions of the 3 Series Touring have a suitably upmarket cabin, with a neat dashboard layout and high-quality materials throughout.

It's comfortable, it has excellent ergonomics and rear space is good enough for adults – plus you get a capacious 495-litre boot.

Sure, you will choose this estate for its additional practicality, but you will love owning one more for its impressive economy, engaging drive, elegantly finished interior and, in most cases, outstanding performance.

SAM PHILLIPS

This generation also offered saloon and liftback bodies

> "It outclassed rivals for comfort and space – but what really set it apart was its rewarding handling"

How to get one in your garage

AN OWNER'S VIEW

PERDEEP SINGH THIARA

"I've owned my F31 335d for more than five years. I had it slightly fettled with a stage-two tune, which helped cut the 0-60mph time to 4.2sec and pushed the top speed up to 172mph, and yet it will still do 60mpg-plus if I sit in the slow lane at 58mph.

"BMW says the gearbox, differential and transfer box have a lifetime fill of oil, but component supplier ZF advises a service every 60,000 miles. You can feel the gearbox becoming less responsive and slushier over time. Getting these parts serviced at a specialist costs about £700."

BUYER BEWARE...

■ ENGINE

The timing chain on early 'M47' four-cylinder diesels can stretch and snap. If you hear a rattle or ticking on start-up, walk away.

Check the rocker covers for oil leaks as the gasket can wear. It's £50-£80 for a new one.

The diesel particulate filter (DPF) can get clogged up without regular higher-speed driving, so make sure the car doesn't go into limp mode. Specialists can force a regeneration to clear it, but if that doesn't work it will need to be replaced for around £500. Check the flexi pipe from the DPF to the exhaust too, as it can crack.

■ GEARBOX

A driveline fault warning on the dash doesn't necessarily mean the gearbox is faulty; it can appear when the coolant temperature sensor has failed.

A vibration through the clutch pedal, rattling sound or juddering when accelerating could mean the dual-mass flywheel will soon need to be replaced.

■ DRIVETRAIN

Check that there are no oil leaks under the car or a juddering when test driving an xDrive 4WD model, as either could mean the transfer box is dying. A new one is £500.

■ ELECTRICS

The FRM (footwell) module, which controls the headlights, central locking and wipers, can fail, requiring replacement.

Make sure the infotainment system has no glitches. If it does, a software update might cure it.

■ BODY

The fuel flap's solenoid can fail, preventing you from opening it. It's an easy fix, though, and there's a back-up release in the boot.

■ AIR CONDITIONING

Play around with the air-con, as the compressors are known to break, typically due to lack of use.

ALSO WORTH KNOWING

There are several trims to choose from, including SE, Sport, Luxury and, most commonly, M Sport.

All versions get BMW's iDrive infotainment system, which is intuitive, graphically strong and easy to control while driving.

Cars previously used by the police often come up for sale for very reasonable money. Of course, some have battle scars, but we did find a tidy 330d that had been fitted with a brand-new engine by BMW for £11,000.

HOW MUCH TO SPEND

£2500-£7999

High-mileage examples of varying condition, with the 320d dominating. We saw one example with 307,000 miles on the clock.

£8000-£14,999

Vast array of ages, conditions and mileages. Plenty of newer examples with smaller engines, contrasted by higher-mileage M Sport six-cylinder diesels.

£15,000-£22,999

Post-facelift cars with reasonable mileage. London ULEZ-compliant Euro 6 diesels become available.

£23,000 AND ABOVE

Immaculate cars with low to reasonable miles. Dealers only.

ONE WE FOUND

BMW 330D TOURING LUXURY, 2015, 88,000 MILES, £9995

While this understated Luxury model looks like a boggo 3 Series, it in fact has a 254bhp straight-six diesel. It has covered a fair number of miles but has a long MOT until November and a full service history. Euro 6, too. The ultimate sleeper estate?

My car & I

Living and loving the Lamborghini high life

Lamborghinis and the like are catwalk stars that don't go out when it rains and sip E5 once in a while, right? No, not if Bav Majithia owns them. "Every car I own, I drive," he says. "For me, it's use it and enjoy it."

For proof, look no further than Bav's Aventador S. He bought it new in 2018 and has so far clocked up 15,000 miles running around the country for work (he's an entrepreneur and co-owner of Yiannimize, a vehicle customisation and motoring events company).

"It's my daily driver as well as the car I take on our Yiannimize grand tour road trips," he says. "Last year I did London to Marbella in it, and this year I'm doing Rome to Dubrovnik. Older Lambos were a bit clunky in traffic and would overheat, but these modern ones cope as well as any other car. The ride is very comfortable, especially in the Standard setting; in Sport it stiffens up and makes lots of bangs and whistles and is huge fun. It's a joy to drive."

You may be thinking that compared with your average car, 15,000 miles is still no big deal in seven years. However, the Aventador is not Bav's only set of wheels. At the same time, he notched up 12,000 miles in his

Our cars

The Mazda has moved on, so what's next?

BY JACK HARRISON

The mighty Mazda MX-5 1.8 S has left the stable. As you might recall from the last time I wrote about it, I was a little unsure what to do with it owing to its various mechanical woes.

I managed to get it up and running with fairly little outlay thanks to some driveway bodging, but I decided to sell it immediately after taking it for a drive.

They say you always want what you can't have, and I think that's how I deal with cars. Far too often I enjoy the thought of driving my own cars more than the act itself. I'm a busy person and life really does get in the way – and that's before you factor in fuel costs, suicidal deer and octogenarians refusing to go above 20mph.

Not to say that the MX-5 was a bad car to drive. Quite the opposite, in fact: it was excellent. Revvy and superbly balanced, with steering so much greater than that of most cars of today. If you'll excuse the cliché, it's driving pleasure in its simplest form. Plus, with that limited-slip differential and some of the worst tyres I've ever used adorning the rear wheels, it was genuinely exciting at times (by which I mean I was convinced I was going to die every time I drove it in the wet).

Mk2 MX-5s are currently – and rightly – in demand, and despite its flaws it was gone less than a day after being listed for sale. I am sort of missing it, but I think that's just the aforementioned desire to be driving more than anything else. What's next? Not sure, but a quick search tells me that Twin Spark Alfa Romeo GTVs aren't a lot of money at the moment…

By popular demand: the MX-5 sold quickly – once it was running properly

Never mind the V12, Blu Nethuns paint is a head-turner all on its own

"It's due a service, an MOT and a warranty – a real 'ouch' moment"

Bav has owned the Lamborghini from new and uses it regularly

Aventadors aren't for shrinking violets

Porsche 911 GT3 RS, which he owned for 18 months and which he has just sold. On that point, doesn't the trade clobber him when they see his leggy catwalk motors rock up? "Not so far," he claims. "I've never felt I was being penalised for doing five-figure mileages."

I imagine Bav will be coy about telling me what his Aventador cost him, but he replies quick as a flash: "£348,000". I guess it's not a figure you forget in a hurry. It has only a few options, including being finished in Blu Nethuns, a real eyeful that, now I think of it, matches the colour of his sunglasses. The car also has a sports exhaust.

Given its mileage and Bav's years of ownership, he must be a familiar face at his local Lamborghini workshop. "I certainly am," he says. "The Aventador's average servicing cost is around £5000." That sounds about par to me, but it's what he says next that really puts Lamborghini ownership into perspective: "The extended 12-month warranty from Lamborghini is around £9000. People tell me I should instead save the money for when I need it. However, the car has suffered a few issues in recent months, with the air conditioning, the water pump and the rear wing. They've all been covered under the warranty; had the car not been covered, I'd have had some big bills.

"However, 12 months' cover gets more expensive with each passing year. The Aventador has a three-year warranty as standard, and every year since then I've purchased an extended warranty. The first couple of years it was £6000, but it has since jumped up to £9000. It's due a service, an MOT and a warranty soon – a real 'ouch' moment." Could it be the excuse he's looking for to move it on? "No way," says Bav. "I can't see myself selling it because there's no other car that would give me the same smiles per mile."

JOHN EVANS

Head to head

CHARLIE MARTIN

2009 VOLVO S40 1.6S

VS

KRIS CULMER

2006 TOYOTA PREVIA 2.4 VVT-i SPIRIT

Brief: Find a robust family car that isn't an SUV for less than £4500

CM Volvos are the last word in robust family transport: reliable, comfortable and safe. Add to that a dose of dynamic sheen by way of Ford Focus underpinnings and this S40 is an easy winner.

KC All of that is true, yes. But your average Toyota will last longer than your average British road surface. And that is surely the definition of 'robust'.

CM Actually, it's the road surface that kills 'em: Japanese imports aren't well protected against rust, so the winter salt we sprinkle over our Tarmac gets them. Not a concern with my Viking warrior.

KC Nothing of the sort mentioned on the MOT report, so I'll just buy some underseal. Easy. Anyway, we're meant to be finding a car that can transport kids and their clutter, yet you've chosen a compact saloon. My MPV, on the other hand, has so many seats that Boris Johnson drives one.

CM Just have short children. Problem solved. At least my kids would be able to get into my car. Anonymous its design may be, but it's far less embarrassing than that Previa.

KC My dad made me suffer first in a Vauxhall Zafira and then a Ford C-Max, and my children deserve a similar character-building start to their life.

CAUGHT IN THE CLASSIFIEDS

FERRARI F12 BERLINETTA V12

2013, 38,000 miles, £136,995

It's a bit older than the Aventador (left), but this 730bhp F12 has performance and curb appeal in spades. The car is loaded with extras, and don't worry about scuffing the Rosso Berlinetta paint because it has a full protection film.

AUDI R8 V10 PERFORMANCE EDITION

2023, 500 miles, £126,990

This R8 V10 Performance Edition has a useful 612bhp and can top 200mph. It's done only 500 miles and comes with its manufacturer warranty plus carbonfibre, Alcantara and plenty of tech including Audi's brilliant Virtual Cockpit.

McLAREN 720S

2017, 3800 miles, £131,995

This 710bhp V8-powered McLaren missile has blistering performance, stunning pearlescent paint, one former owner and a full McLaren service history. Extras include the all-important front nose lift and a B&W sound system.

ASTON MARTIN DBS V12 SUPERLEGGERA

2020, 23,000 miles, £124,950

As GT cars go the DBS is one of the best, and this Midnight Blue Superleggera is ideal for a European road trip. The 715bhp twin-turbo V12 makes the DBS so special to own and drive.

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Steve Cropley

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The Autocar Lost in the archive

Simplicity or complexity? Eighties icons clash

Blockbuster supercar showdowns are rare and always momentous occasions. Typically coming perhaps only once a decade, comparisons of the latest boundary-pushing feats of incredible engineering never fail to excite and inspire. And one of the greatest of all appeared in Autocar in the summer of 1988: Ferrari F40 versus Porsche 959.

Despite them appearing at first glance as the most natural of rivals, a closer look quickly revealed fundamental contrasts between what were the two fastest production cars in the world.

The mechanically simple F40 weighed merely 1100kg, thanks to innovative use of carbonfibre and Kevlar, and made a stonking 478bhp, whereas the 959 weighed 1450kg and produced 444bhp but gained significant advantages elsewhere by being a technical tour de force.

Our test 959 was owned by privateer endurance racer and F1 team owner Walter Brun, who we accompanied to Italy to meet an F40 with the Scuderia's Gerhard Berger at the wheel.

Their attention turned immediately to the F40. As the final car overseen by Enzo Ferrari himself, it was always going to be a special chapter in Maranello's history. And thanks to that lightweight construction and a twin-turbocharged V8 engine "with performance characteristics that make others look as flat as a pizza", it had become the first-ever production car to break the 200mph barrier.

Berger praised it as "the best road chassis I have ever driven" and Brun said: "With racing tyres and some fine-tuning, it would easily run at the front of category C2 [the pinnacle of sports car racing]."

Perhaps surprisingly, the F40 had a performance advantage over the 959 not just in terms of top speed – 201mph versus 197mph – but also through the corners. So much so that it would be about 10sec per lap quicker than its German rival around Ferrari's Fiorano test track.

Porsche 959 cost £132k then. It's worth just over £1m now

Ferrari F40 was pricier then at £163k, and is even more so now at almost £2m

"It runs fantastically well," said Berger. "It bites from around 3000rpm and upwards of 3500rpm it really takes off as if the turbos are constantly supplying full boost." We added: "Beyond 3500rpm, there is such an abundance of power and torque that Berger had power oversteer any time he felt like it." Indeed, he considered it was "nearly an act of provocation to offer a car with so much power and so light weight to an ordinary driver".

As for the 959, "its two-stage turbocharging system gives it performance that is more typical of a blown engine than the F40's", we said. "Up to 4300rpm, only the first turbo puffs into the cylinders of the flat six; above that, the second blower comes in. This makes it feel rather leisurely below 4500rpm. Then it suddenly explodes as it begins to dispense real power."

There was another side to all this, however: "The F40's advantage is clear when the sky is blue and the Tarmac fairly smooth, but the 959 is a car which permits massive acceleration and deceleration even on wet surfaces, slush or gravel."

You see, while Ferrari had compromised everything else in order to be as light and as fast as possible, Porsche had given its supercar a complex four-wheel drive system, computer-controlled power distribution, self-levelling suspension, power steering and advanced anti-lock brakes, not to mention rear seats within its plush cabin, in an effort to demonstrate a new concept within the world of supercars: everyday usability.

We elaborated: "The Italians say they never intended to construct a high-tech cathedral; they simply wanted to build the world's fastest sports car. They seem to have succeeded. Porsche, on the other hand, wanted to build a car that contained the ultimate in driveline technology and showed how easy and manageable very high power outputs could be made in the hands of any driver in all conditions. Anyone who has driven a 959 in a range of weathers knows that it too has succeeded."

We therefore concluded that the 959 was the winner hands down, the F40 being for special occasions only.

Nevertheless, these contrasting personalities showed the world that a supercar could be built in two very different but equally brilliant ways, and there's no denying both cars fully deserve the prominent places they have since taken in automotive folklore.

DANNY DAVIES

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In pre-war years, we concerned ourselves with braking effort, gradient climbing capability and rolling resistance. Later our attention shifted to take in acceleration, top speed, stopping distance and cruising noise level.

Today we use the Horiba MIRA proving ground in the Midlands to take similar performance benchmarks of new cars – and we've recently expanded the test's remit to take in braking stamina over repeated stops and, in the case of electrified cars, DC rapid-charging performance and measured acceleration at both high and low indicated states of battery charge.

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Matt Saunders, road test editor

STAR RATINGS EXPLAINED

Autocar star ratings aren't like those you may read elsewhere. We don't simply give the best car in any given class five stars, the worst one star and filter the rest in between.

Rather than thinking in entirely relative terms, we rank cars according to more abstract definitions of their performance, functionality and fitness for purpose, so that every particular verdict means something and has a degree of permanence.

We also penalise cars up to a star for what we consider particularly conspicuous and regressive failings concerning active safety systems or missing instrumentation or physical secondary controls.

☆ Hopeless, egregious. In some cases, potentially dangerous.
⯪ Appalling. An emphatic failure.
★ Very poor. Consistently flawed or seriously misconceived.
★⯪ Inadequate. Sub-standard in key areas.
★★ Mediocre. Acceptable at best.
★★⯪ Competent. Mostly average, with very few highlights.
★★★ Respectable. Consistently decent, with some strengths.
★★★⯪ Good. Well rounded and competitive in key areas.
★★★★ Very good. Sets some new class standards and misses few.
★★★★⯪ Excellent. Extends several key class standards.
★★★★★ Exceptional, unsurpassed. All but flawless.

ABARTH

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500 Esseesse ★★★★☆ 25.3.09 Charm on a stick. Raucous and fun.	7.6	6.5	1135	35.8	-
500e Turismo ★★★⯪☆ 9.8.23 A stylish and entertaining pint-size EV but pricey and needs refining.	6.9	6.4	1395	-	142
595 Competizione ★★★⯪☆ 26.2.14 Great when it's good but tiring when it's bad.	7.5	6.4	1135	39.2	-

ALFA ROMEO

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Giulia Quadrifoglio ★★★★⯪ 29.3.17 Everything you would want a fast Alfa Romeo saloon to be. A triumph.	4.5	3.2	1700	35.7	-
Stelvio 2.2D 210 Milano Edizione ★★★⯪☆ 3.1.18 Likeable, if short of class's usual refinements.	6.8	7.0	1815	49.7	-
Stelvio Quadrifoglio ★★★⯪☆ 9.1.19 A real driver's car, but it stretches SUV-related bounds of acceptability.	4.0	3.3	1931	31.9	-
Stelvio 2.0T 280 Veloce AWD ★★★★☆ 28.6.23 Short on premium refinement but meets its discreetly sporty brief well.	5.7	5.3	1784	32.2	-

ALPINE

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A110 Première Edition ★★★★★ 16.5.18 Hilarious fun delivered in effusive and accessible fashion.	4.7	3.8	1125	45.6	-
A110 Légende GT ★★★★⯪ 9.3.22 The best fast A110 we've seen but not quite the definitive version.	4.8	3.9	1140	40.2	-
A110 R ★★★⯪☆ 15.11.23 Hardcore A110 has its lures but probably not enough of them for its price.	4.2	3.5	1094	39.7	-

ARIEL

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Atom 4 ★★★★★ 9.10.19 Track-slayer is unrivalled for built-in quality and dynamic character.	3.2	2.4	680	39.2	-

ASTON MARTIN

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Vantage ★★★★⯪ 18.9.24 Baby Aston grows up to spectacular effect. A machine of stunning breadth and likeability.	3.5	2.6	1745	28.5	-
DBS Superleggera ★★★★★ 21.11.18 Effortlessly fast and intoxicating to drive, the big Aston is better than ever.	3.7	2.7	1910	25.6	-
Vanquish ★★★★⯪ 26.3.25 Aston's blown V12 lives on in a devastatingly effective super-GT.	3.1	2.3	1951	25.8	-
DBX 707 ★★★★☆ 30.11.22 A better DBX to drive, but still leaves room for improvement.	3.3	2.8	2278	26.2	-

AUDI

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A1 Sportback 35 TFSI S Line Style Edition ★★★⯪☆ 2.10.19 Luxury supermini lacks the polish to justify its high price.	7.9	8.4	1209	57.0	-
S3 Sportback ★★★⯪☆ 18.11.20 Audi delivers an effective if somewhat unlovable hot hatch.	4.8	4.2	1552	39.0	-
RS4 Avant ★★★★☆ 14.2.18 A hot estate that oozes class but is curiously short on charisma.	4.0	3.5	1790	36.7	-
S5 Launch Edition ★★★★☆ 15.1.25 Rounded sports saloon with a characterful V6 and new-found dose of driver appeal.	4.1	3.8	2027	33.7	-
A6 50 TFSIe Quattro S Line ★★★★☆ 5.1.22 Hybrid tech boosts saloon's refinement, charm and running credentials.	5.7	5.2	2077	45.4	34
S6 E-tron Avant Launch Edition ★★★⯪☆ 16.4.25 Strong technical showing is undermined by price and lack of discernible character.	3.7	2.9	2346	2.8	256
RS6 Avant GT ★★★★☆ 5.2.25 Retro visual charm meets unprecedented dynamism in big-hearted estate.	3.2	2.7	2144	26.3	-
A7 Sportback 50 TDI Quattro Sport ★★★⯪☆ 11.7.18 Easy on the eye and to live with but let down by stolid dynamics.	5.8	5.3	1880	53.1	-
A8 L 60 TFSIe Quattro Sport ★★★⯪☆ 17.6.20 Technically impressive but not as cosseting as a limo ought to be.	-	-	2330	-	-
E-tron 55 Quattro ★★★★⯪ 26.6.19 A rounded, uber-luxurious addition to the premium EV niche.	5.4	4.2	2569	-	218
E-tron S Quattro ★★★⯪☆ 2.6.21 A slick, tech-laden luxury operator but no dynamic landmark for EVs.	4.2	3.6	2643	-	-
Q2 1.4 TFSI Sport ★★★⯪☆ 9.11.16 Fit for purpose but a less compelling option than it might have been.	8.1	8.2	1316	-	-
SQ2 Quattro S Tronic ★★★★☆ 20.3.19 More fun than you might expect from a crossover or an Audi S model.	4.5	4.1	1530	34.5	-
Q4 E-tron 40 Sport ★★★⯪☆ 7.7.21 Practical, pleasant and efficient but not a superior premium product.	8.1	7.8	2112	-	-
Q5 2.0 TDI 190PS Quattro S Line S Tronic ★★★★☆ 15.3.17 Like the previous Q5 but with additional class, dynamism and polish.	8.3	8.5	1770	42.5	-
SQ5 TSI Quattro ★★★⯪☆ 21.6.17 Hot SUV bites off more than it can chew.	5.5	5.0	1870	32.6	-
SQ5 Sportback TDI Quattro ★★★⯪☆ 3.8.22 Not the sharpest fast SUV, but the real-world appeal is clear to see.	5.1	4.6	2023	49.0	-
Q6 E-tron Quattro Edition 1 ★★★⯪☆ 2.10.24 EV is hard to love, easier to recommend, with good dynamics and strong EV credentials.	5.3	4.3	–	2.8	247
Q7 3.0 TDI Quattro S Line ★★★★☆ 12.8.15 Plush, suave and spacious but so-so to drive.	6.2	6.2	2245	-	-
SQ7 4.0 TDI Quattro ★★★★⯪ 26.10.16 A class-topping blend of superlative comfort and usable performance.	5.1	4.5	2330	37.9	-
Q8 50 TDI S Line ★★★★☆ 26.9.18 Striking and effective SUV-coupé leaves us wanting more.	6.9	6.7	2285	40.1	-
R8 V10 Plus ★★★★☆ 30.12.15 Supercar grips and goes even harder but wants for its predecessor's delicacy.	3.1	2.6	1730	-	-
S E-tron GT ★★★★☆ 2.4.25 Audi's super-EV holds great appeal in its purest form but isn't at the bleeding edge.	3.1	2.4	2361	2.8	262

BENTLEY

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Bentayga W12 ★★★★⯪ 18.5.16 Versatile, genteel, luxurious SUV with a silken sporting edge.	4.9	4.4	2440	-	-
Bentayga EWB Mulliner Blackline ★★★★☆ 24.4.24 Stretched SUV lacks the Mulsanne limo's charm but is a better luxury car by far.	4.4	3.8	2600	25.6	-
Continental GT Speed ★★★★☆ 22.12.21 Remains a wonderful grand tourer but can fall short as an entertainer.	3.4	2.7	2279	22.0	-
Continental GTC V8 S ★★★★⯪ 19.4.23 Sporty V8 execution adds vivacity to a car that makes you feel good.	3.6	3.2	2295	29.1	-
Continental GT Speed Hybrid First Edition ★★★★☆ 16.4.25 Electrons make fastest GT quicker but not necessarily better.	3.1	2.5	2462	28.0	47

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Flying Spur W12	★★★★½	15.7.20	Trounces rivals for driver appeal but not in every way that matters.	3.9	3.2	2500	32.5	-
Flying Spur Hybrid Mulliner	★★★★½	17.8.22	Mightily convincing PHEV limo more than earns its Bentley wings.	4.4	3.9	2596	30.1	28

BMW

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
120 M Sport	★★★½☆	31.12.24	Credible and complete junior BMW still lacks distinguishing driver appeal.	7.3	6.8	1489	45.8	-
218i M Sport Gran Coupé	★★★☆☆	8.4.20	Junior Gran Coupé hits some high notes but fails to inspire.	8.8	8.4	1375	58.2	-
220i M Sport Coupé	★★★★☆	1.6.22	A good coupé rather than a great sports car.	7.3	7.3	1546	46.8	-
M2 Coupé Manual	★★★★½	12.7.23	Junior M car takes huge objective leaps but smaller subjective ones.	4.5	3.8	1687	32.1	-
320d M Sport Auto	★★★★★	15.5.19	BMW's one-time default-choice executive saloon hits even greater heights.	6.9	6.8	1639	63.3	-
330d xDrive M Sport Plus Edition Touring	★★★★½	15.1.20	An estate that's powerful, classy and great to drive – but with a price to match.	5.5	5.2	1922	52.6	-
330e M Sport	★★★★½	1.7.20	Slicker and sweeter-handling than the average PHEV. A true 3 Series.	-	-	1740	-	-
M440i xDrive	★★★★☆	6.1.21	A rounded, engaging and potent coupé let down only by its looks.	4.1	3.7	1775	44.0	-
M4 Competition	★★★★½	21.4.21	A very modern M car and a brilliantly versatile and enjoyable one.	3.9	2.9	1800	32.7	-
M4 CS	★★★★☆	23.4.25	Stunning performance and pace comes with costs that aren't so easy to justify.	2.9	2.5	1747	32.4	-
i4 M50	★★★★☆	19.1.22	Fast, refined and with lots of traditional appeal to convert sceptics.	4.1	3.2	2248	-	186
M4 CSL	★★★★☆	16.11.22	A next-level M car, with the more complex temperament to match.	3.6	2.7	1625	31.1	-
M5	★★★½☆	29.1.25	A technical leap, but one born more out of necessity than inspiration.	3.5	2.8	2373	27.3	35
i5 eDrive40 M Sport Pro	★★★½☆	29.11.23	Has dynamic appeal but less convincing than BMW's other EV saloons.	5.4	4.4	2213	-	235
550e xDrive M Sport Pro	★★★★☆	3.4.24	Undeniably capable and a fine plug-in hybrid sports saloon.	4.4	3.5	2232	40.1	47
i7 xDrive60 M Sport	★★★★½	15.2.23	It has taken huge strides as a luxury car – and still drives like a BMW.	4.5	3.4	2758	-	264
840d xDrive	★★★★☆	16.1.19	A likeable big GT, albeit not the most luxurious or rewarding on sale.	5.0	4.6	1901	49.2	-
M8 Competition Convertible	★★★½☆	5.2.20	Has attitude to spare but isn't the complete super-GT.	3.3	2.7	2020	31.6	-
M8 Competition	★★★½☆	3.6.20	Highly capable but doesn't truly satisfy as either a sports car or a GT.	-	-	1960	-	-
X1 xDrive23i M Sport	★★★½☆	25.1.23	A decent family crossover but a poor BMW.	6.4	6.0	1800	45.6	-
X4 M Competition	★★★☆☆	13.11.19	Fast and precise, if short on the big-time charisma that you would expect.	4.0	3.3	2028	29.0	-
X5 xDrive30d M Sport	★★★★☆	2.1.19	Better to drive than the SUV norm but not better across the board.	6.6	6.6	2279	43.1	-
X6 M Competition	★★★☆☆	20.3.24	Unyielding performance focus makes for a fast but compromised SUV.	3.5	3.1	2442	29.3	-
X7 M60i xDrive	★★★★☆	29.3.23	Uncompromising-looking X7 is seriously fast but laudably refined.	4.2	3.7	2600	28.9	-
iX xDrive50 M Sport	★★★★½	2.3.22	Takes the luxury EV to elevated heights, but its design is easy to criticise.	4.4	3.4	2593	-	252
Z4 M40i with Handschalter Pack	★★★★☆	21.8.24	Manual gearbox gives six-year-old roadster new depth.	5.7	5.9	1561	36.9	-

BMW ALPINA

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
B3 GT Touring	★★★★½	15.1.25	Last-dance B3 has mighty breadth and will go down as one of the all-time greats.	3.3	2.7	1910	29.4	-
B8 Gran Coupé	★★★★☆	22.9.21	Superbly rounded but lacking some dynamism implied by its looks.	3.5	2.8	2100	-	-

BYD

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Atto 3 Design	★★★☆☆	31.5.23	Lack of attention to detail detracts from the impressive battery tech.	7.0	6.2	1787	-	201
Seal Design	★★★½☆	17.1.24	Frustrating software lets down the mostly impressive hardware.	5.8	4.7	2116	-	279

CATERHAM

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Seven 160	★★★★☆	20.11.13	Fun entry-level version of B-road toy smacks just a little of compromise.	8.4	8.7	510	44.8	-
Seven 620S	★★★★½	9.3.16	Supplies fun intravenously with a mix of freneticism and road-going usability.	3.8	4.2	650	29.5	-
Seven 420 Cup	★★★★½	31.8.22	Track-day variant serves up sensational driving thrills – for a price.	4.2	3.4	560	35.3	-

CHEVROLET

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corvette 3LT	★★★★☆	22.6.22	Big step up for charismatic, usable and temptingly priced American icon.	3.9	3.2	1679	32.9	-
Corvette Z06 3LZ	★★★★☆	16.8.23	Incredible engine and chassis makeover, but the price has to be right.	3.1	2.4	1670	26.1	-

CITROEN

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ami Colour	★★½☆☆	11.1.23	Cleverly conceived but hard to recommend, given its limited capabilities.	-	-	471	-	39
ë-C3 Max	★★★½☆	30.4.25	Predictable limitations but also plenty of usability, space and cheer for the money.	10.7	10.3	1479	2.8	-
C3 Aircross Puretech 110 Flair	★★★½☆	7.3.18	Practical small crossover isn't outstanding to drive but is likeable nonetheless.	11.5	10.7	1159	39.5	-
C4 Puretech 130 Shine Plus Auto	★★★☆☆	26.5.21	Has rational and irrational appeal but lacks a fine-tuned execution.	9.5	9.2	1320	56.4	-
ë-C4 X Shine	★★★½☆	3.5.23	EV motoring done differently, with value, but its successes are qualified.	9.7	8.8	1623	-	162
C5 Aircross BlueHDi 180 Flair Plus	★★★½☆	13.2.19	Attractive and interesting, although its style is better than its substance.	9.0	8.5	1540	47.8	-
C5 X Puretech 180 Shine Plus	★★★★☆	28.9.22	Good value and comfy, this is the kind of car that Citroën should be making.	7.8	7.1	1502	47.8	-

CUPRA

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Born 204PS 58kWh V3	★★★½☆	6.7.22	As good as the family hatchback EV class gets in places but not as good as it could be.	6.7	6.2	1794	-	220
Born VZ First Edition	★★★★☆	9.10.24	An already fine electric car's driver appeal is lifted but not transformed.	5.4	4.2	1996	3.5	269
Leon Estate 310PS VZ3	★★★★☆	8.9.21	Fiercely quick and dependable but pulls the heartstrings only lightly.	4.9	4.3	1707	40.1	-
Leon 2.0 TSI 245PS VZ2	★★★★☆	27.7.22	Brilliantly rounded hot hatch shines in its simplest spec.	5.9	4.7	1468	43.4	-
Ateca 2.0 TSI 4Drive DSG	★★★½☆	23.1.19	Hot crossover is objectively impressive but lacks true driver reward.	4.9	4.4	1615	36.7	-
Formentor 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2 DSG	★★★★½	3.2.21	Versatile, interesting, rewarding. One of the best fast crossovers yet.	5.1	4.3	1583	36.4	-
Tavascan V1	★★★☆☆	5.2.25	Electric SUV is competent but not very compelling or memorable.	6.0	5.0	2129	3.2	246

DACIA

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Sandero Stepway TCe 90 Prestige	★★★★☆	28.4.21	Cut-price crossover is compromised in surprisingly few areas.	11.9	11.9	1096	54.1	-
Duster Hybrid 140 Journey	★★★★½	27.11.24	Notably improved yet barely any pricier.	9.7	8.7	1413	40.2	-
Jogger TCe 110 Comfort	★★★★½	20.4.22	Superb versatility, outstanding value and so likeable with it.	11.0	11.0	1267	48.5	-

DS

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3 Crossback Puretech 155 Prestige	★★★☆☆	10.7.19	No design smash hit. Short on perceived quality and dynamic polish.	8.8	8.3	1205	48.6	-
4 E-Tense 225 Performance Line+	★★★½☆	29.6.22	High price and a list of niggles keep this family hatchback away from the top.	7.4	6.0	1706	44.7	26
7 Crossback Puretech 225 Prestige	★★★½☆	19.9.18	DS's first SUV is a competent but slightly bland addition to the class.	8.6	7.0	1616	44.6	-
7 E-Tense 4x4 360 La Première	★★★½☆	26.4.23	More focused and makes subtle gains, but its powertrain and ride frustrate.	5.7	4.6	1956	36.6	29
9 E-Tense 225 Performance Line Plus	★★★½☆	2.2.22	Posh saloon is alternative and devoted to its luxury remit but no show-stopper.	8.6	7.1	1886	44.7	20

FERRARI

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
296 GTB	★★★★★	21.12.22	Stellar modern-era Ferrari supercar has an unrivalled breadth of talent.	2.7	1.9	1648	37.8	15
SF90 Stradale	★★★★☆	3.11.21	Sets the performance benchmark but isn't a track-handling great.	2.5	1.8	1698	24.4	16

FIAT

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500 Twinair Lounge	★★★½☆	24.11.10	Characterful and stylish, but its real-world economy lets it down.	11.7	13.0	1070	42.1	-
500C 1.2 Pop	★★★★☆	5.8.09	Landaulet hits the spot every bit as well as the regular hatchback and is often better.	13.2	14.4	1035	48.3	-
500e 42kWh Icon	★★★★☆	26.1.22	More than just an electric city car and a welcome return to form.	8.1	7.7	1365	-	142
600e La Prima	★★★½☆	27.3.24	Electric crossover is decent value and easy to drive but otherwise a bit easy to overlook.	8.8	7.7	1587	-	173

FORD

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Fiesta 1.0 Ecoboost 125PS Titanium ★★★★⯪ 9.8.17 A dynamically brilliant supermini but no longer the best one.	6.6	7.8	1218	48.2	-
Fiesta ST ★★★★⯪ 15.8.18 Great to drive and supreme value but not better than before in all aspects.	6.6	7.8	1218	48.2	-
Focus 1.5 Ecoboost 182PS ST-Line X ★★★★⯪ 20.2.19 Better to drive and look at than before and impressively good value.	8.9	7.8	1417	43.8	-
Focus ST ★★★★☆ 11.9.19 Big on character and performance but not quite truly immersive.	6.1	4.9	1433	40.7	-
Puma 1.0T 125PS MHEV Titanium ★★★★⯪ 25.3.20 The driver's car the compact crossover class has been crying out for and more besides.	10.0	9.6	1260	50.0	-
Puma ST ★★★★☆ 24.3.21 Well judged, versatile and fun. The jacked-up hot hatch done well.	7.2	6.2	1301	41.5	-
Explorer Extended Range Premium RWD ★★★⯪☆ 23.10.24 Electric family crossover is better to drive than rivals, but at a cost.	5.8	4.8	2067	2.9	262
Kuga 2.5 PHEV ST-Line ★★★⯪☆ 24.6.20 Good value and potentially frugal, but this SUV has more to give.	-	-	1844	-	-
Mustang Mach-E Extended Range RWD ★★★★☆ 23.6.21 Worthy of the name? Perhaps not, but it's still impressive and likeable.	6.8	5.6	2130	-	-
Mustang Mach-E GT AWD ★★★☆☆ 27.4.22 Has its moments but lacks the dynamism of a typical fast Ford.	4.2	3.5	2298	-	-
Mustang Dark Horse ★★★⯪☆ 20.11.24 Brimming with character but more compromised than many of its forebears.	4.5	3.5	1853	26.1	-
Tourneo Courier 1.0 Ecoboost Titanium ★★★⯪☆ 10.7.24 Has some Ford-typical star quality but not enough for the money.	10.8	10.6	1426	47.4	-
Transit Custom L2H1 320 2.0 EcoBlue 150PS Limited ★★★★☆ 8.5.24 Likely to remain the default commercial vehicle, despite a high price.	12.1	11.8	1971	38.8	-
Ranger 2.0TD EcoBlue 205PS Wildtrak ★★★★⯪ 14.6.23 Pick-up truck is practical, car-like to drive and generally hard to fault.	9.8	9.9	2348	36.6	-
F-150 Lightning Platinum ★★★⯪☆ 17.5.23 Electric truck has huge utility and appealing range, but its size and price will put many off.	4.5	3.7	3121	-	288

GENESIS

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
G70 2.2 CRDi Luxury Line ★★★⯪☆ 10.11.21 Likeable left-field choice struggles to threaten the establishment.	7.2	6.7	1751	60.4	-
Electrified G80 ★★★⯪☆ 12.10.22 Electric limo doesn't quite hit the mark like its Kia and Hyundai platform-mates.	4.4	4.0	2349	-	272
GV60 Sport Plus ★★★★☆ 24.8.22 Handsome, fast, sophisticated electric crossover is the best Genesis yet.	3.8	3.1	2192	-	220
GV80 3.0D Luxury 5-Seater ★★★⯪☆ 15.9.21 Rich, spacious and comfortable but not a world-class luxury SUV yet.	6.7	6.6	2217	45.0	-

GWM ORA

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Funky Cat 48kWh First Edition ★★⯪☆☆ 1.2.23 Electric hatch is decent value and has funky looks but is a mediocre experience overall.	7.7	7.2	1580	-	154

HONDA

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
E Advance ★★★⯪☆ 26.8.20 More than just a pretty face in the EV crowd but its limited range is an issue.	7.9	-	1535	-	110
Jazz 1.5 i-MMD Hybrid EX ★★★⯪☆ 7.10.20 Eminently practical, impressively frugal and pretty joyless to drive.	9.6	10.0	1248	57.0	-
Civic Type R GT ★★★★⯪ 25.10.17 Hot hatch is a sheer delight for enthusiast drivers and their bank balances.	5.7	7.1	1400	57.0	-
HR-V e:HEV Advance Style ★★★⯪☆ 24.11.21 Fine ergonomics and big on superficial charm but leaves us cold.	9.2	9.3	1397	43.2	-
e:Ny1 Advance ★★★☆☆ 1.11.23 EV is charming in some ways but has too little substance to justify the price.	8.6	6.9	1756	-	211

HYUNDAI

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
i10 1.2 MPi Premium ★★★★☆ 15.4.20 Smallest Hyundai regains leadership of the city car class.	12.3	12.9	999	52.5	-
i20 1.0 T-GDi 100 48V SE Connect ★★★⯪☆ 24.2.21 Steady gains for a versatile runabout still lacking some personality.	9.7	10.1	1065	63.5	-
i20 N ★★★★⯪ 25.8.21 N division's finest car to date. A serious hot hatch with real dynamic polish.	6.1	5.4	1231	50.6	-
i30 Tourer 1.4 T-GDi Premium SE ★★★⯪☆ 13.9.17 Competent, servile, inoffensive-looking family estate offers little to like or dislike.	9.5	9.7	1425	48.9	-
i30 N Performance ★★★⯪☆ 28.12.17 Hyundai's first hot hatch attempt is fast and full-blooded with rough edges.	6.4	5.6	1478	43.1	-
Ioniq 6 RWD Ultimate ★★★⯪☆ 7.6.23 Usable, rangy and innovative EV let down by cabin packaging and ride.	7.2	6.2	2006	-	272
Kona 1.0 120PS Advance ★★★★☆ 6.9.23 Hyundai brings some cheer, value and space to the compact crossover class.	10.4	10.3	1352	50.4	-
Tucson 1.6 T-GDi Hybrid Premium ★★★★☆ 17.3.21 Tucson shows that Hyundai can do both style and substance.	7.6	6.2	1612	47.7	-
Ioniq 5 N ★★★★★ 7.8.24 A little big and heavy, but compelling like no other EV to date.	3.5	2.7	2221	-	224
Santa Fe Hybrid 4WD Premium ★★★★☆ 16.10.24 A superb lounge on wheels, but let down by its powertrain.	7.9	7.5	2007	32.9	-
Nexo ★★★⯪☆ 12.6.19 Impressive effort that heads in the right direction for hydrogen fuel cell cars.	9.6	9.7	1852	-	-

INEOS

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Grenadier 3.0 T Fieldmaster ★★★⯪☆ 20.9.23 Unquestionably a serious proposition but maybe lacking in innovation.	8.0	8.1	2682	20.9	-

JAECOO

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
7 SHS 2WD Luxury ★★⯪☆☆ 9.4.25 Chinese PHEV SUV is efficient and keenly priced but has too many usability flaws.	7.3	6.4	1814	35.0	41

JAGUAR

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
XE 2.0 200PS R-Sport ★★★★⯪ 1.7.15 Junior saloon hits the spot, matching the best of its German rivals at their own game.	7.6	6.7	1530	48.7	-
XF Sportbrake 300PS R-Sport AWD ★★★⯪☆ 17.4.19 Estate is built on enthusiast values but in need of a wider update.	6.6	6.2	1727	36.8	-
E-Pace D180 AWD SE ★★★⯪☆ 11.4.18 Misses the mark for keen drivers but is a desirable SUV nevertheless.	9.9	10.5	1768	49.2	-
I-Pace EV400 S ★★★★⯪ 12.9.18 Jaguar's landmark car strikes a heavy blow to Tesla's luxury EV monopoly.	4.5	3.5	2236	-	-
F-Pace SVR ★★★★⯪ 24.7.19 Broad-batted and can vividly thrill but hasn't forgotten its SUV roots.	4.1	3.5	2070	29.4	-
F-Pace 400e R-Dynamic HSE ★★★★⯪ 1.12.21 Facelift hits the mark. Electrification is a mixed but creditable success.	5.1	4.6	2264	-	24
F-Type V8 S Convertible ★★★★☆ 12.6.13 As good to drive as it is to behold – but at a material and financial cost.	4.0	3.4	1810	28.5	-
F-Type P575 R AWD Coupé ★★★★☆ 29.4.20 The same likeable bruiser behind those prettier features.	-	-	1743	-	-

JEEP

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Avenger Electric Summit ★★★⯪☆ 24.1.24 Not perfect but successfully takes Jeep in a fresh direction.	8.3	6.9	1601	-	172
Compass 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited ★★★⯪☆ 3.10.18 Pricey, pokey, gruff Jeep is a long shot for SUV market success.	11.0	11.5	1540	44.8	-
Compass 4xe S ★★★☆☆ 16.2.22 Not without niche appeal but off the pace in too many respects.	6.4	5.7	1872	46.9	22
Renegade 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited ★★★⯪☆ 28.10.15 Charmingly authentic but also pricey and rather rough and ready.	10.8	11.2	1502	52.6	-
Renegade 4xe Trailhawk ★★★☆☆ 30.6.21 Electrified Jeep has some charm but is typically rough and ready.	6.7	5.6	1816	39.4	21
Wrangler 2.2 Multijet II Overland ★★★★☆ 10.4.19 Off-road icon is now more competent on it.	9.0	9.1	2122	37.6	-

KGM

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Tivoli XLV ELX Auto ★★★☆☆ 14.9.16 Practical, well-priced crossover is competent but far from compelling.	12.0	12.6	1469	-	-

TOP 3

BEST HYBRID SUVs

1 Skoda Kodiaq iV

2 Mercedes-Benz GLC 300e

3 BMW X5 xDrive50e

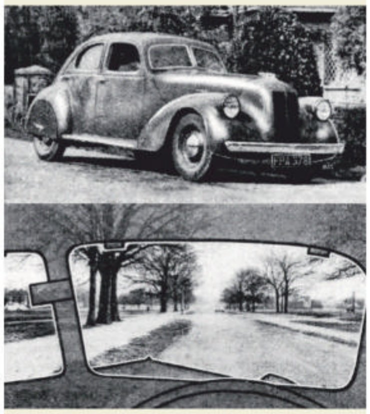
SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

Road tests revisited

1959 TRIUMPH HERALD COUPE

Coventry company revitalises its small car offering by putting some familiar running gear into "encouragingly gay" new pair of bodies styled by Michelotti. Smooth and tractable engine is complemented by "very high standards of road behaviour".

Price £731
Engine 4 cyls in line, 948cc, petrol
Power 43bhp at 5500rpm
Torque 49lb ft at 3000rpm
Weight 953kg
0-30mph 6.1sec
0-60mph 23.2sec
Top speed 80mph
Economy 33.2mpg



1937 CHRYSLER EIGHT SUPER POWER SALOON

American firm collaborates with British land speed record breaker George Eyston to create short-wheelbase sports saloon. "Has a striking capacity to cover ground swiftly" and "corners at decidedly fast speeds without any undue roll or sway".

Price £825
Engine 8 cyls in line, 5299cc, petrol
Power 150bhp (est)
Torque 250lb ft (est)
Weight 1802kg
0-30mph 4.6sec
0-60mph 16.9sec
Quarter mile 95mph
Economy 12mpg

READ FULL ROAD TEST FOR FREE*

KIA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Picanto 1.0 MPI 2	★★★½☆	11.9.24	No great advance for the breed but likeable, capable and still here.	13.4	13.9	985	51.4	-
Ceed 1.6 CRDi 115bhp 2	★★★★☆	29.8.18	Big step up in the family hatchback class is a watershed moment for Kia.	9.9	9.6	1411	70.3	-
Proceed 1.4 T-GDi GT-Line S	★★★½☆	27.2.19	Alluring and interesting but not quite as special to drive as it looks.	9.5	8.9	1475	42.6	-
Xceed 1.4 T-GDi First Edition	★★★½☆	20.11.19	Looks good and drives well but lacks some practicality and polish.	9.3	8.7	1452	46.8	-
Soul EV Urban	★★★½☆	5.7.23	Not actually that cheap but likeable and complete.	8.0	8.3	1569	-	147
Niro EV 3	★★★★☆	7.9.22	A good family EV made better, despite some missed opportunities.	6.9	5.6	1739	-	246
EV3 81.4kWh GT-Line	★★★★☆	31.12.24	New-era Niro is rationally compelling but not a game-changer.	7.2	6.4	1858	2.6	265
Sportage 1.6 HEV 2WD GT-Line S	★★★½☆	15.6.22	Bold family SUV catches the eye but won't hold your interest to drive.	7.3	6.4	1658	44.8	-
EV6 77.4kWh RWD GT-Line S	★★★★☆	9.10.24	Not the outstanding EV it once was but still a likeably bold choice.	7.5	6.3	–	2.9	227
EV6 GT	★★★½☆	4.10.23	Lots of pace and usability for the money but not enough driver appeal.	3.6	2.7	2161	-	209
Sorento 1.6 HEV T-GDi AWD 2	★★★½☆	20.1.21	Lacks polish, but its abundant utility appeal and value shine through.	8.5	7.9	2006	43.3	-
EV9 GT-Line S	★★★★☆	31.1.24	Style, space, versatility and range for a more reasonable price than rivals.	5.1	4.6	2660	-	220

LAMBORGHINI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Huracán Performante	★★★★½	11.10.17	Breathtaking track makeover brings it close to greatness.	2.9	2.0	1590	22.4	-
Huracán Evo RWD	★★★★½	20.5.20	Finest driver's car Lamborghini makes is also the most attainable.	-	-	1389	-	-
Revuelto	★★★★½	4.12.24	New-era V12 Lamborghini is an extraordinary statement of intent.	2.5	1.7	1960	24.1	6
Urus	★★★★☆	3.7.19	Italy's latest 'mostro' has a driving experience to blow your mind.	3.3	2.8	2285	28.5	-

LAND ROVER

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Range Rover Evoque P300e R-Dynamic HSE	★★★★½	10.2.21	A better plug-in compact SUV. Expensive but slick and luxurious.	6.8	5.9	2158	32.7	24
Discovery Sport D180 AWD SE	★★★★☆	8.1.20	Off-road fidelity and character outweigh a lacklustre powertrain.	10.3	10.5	2145	47.5	-
Discovery TD6 HSE Luxury	★★★★½	12.4.17	A proper Land Rover, modernised, refined and as likeable as ever.	8.7	8.8	2230	-	-
Range Rover Velar D240 HSE	★★★½☆	30.8.17	Stylish, advanced and accomplished but in need of a better powertrain.	9.3	9.0	2089	48.2	-
Defender 110 P400 X	★★★★½	13.5.20	World-class capability. Brilliant on and off road – at a price.	-	-	2388	-	-
Defender 110 P635 Octa Edition 1	★★★★½	30.4.25	Outrageous, unnecessary and totally awe-inspiring.	4.6	3.7	2717	22.1	-
Range Rover Sport D300 Dynamic SE	★★★★½	2.11.22	Deeply appealing and deeply accomplished, with a price to match.	7.2	6.6	2511	42.5	-
Range Rover Sport SV Edition One	★★★½☆	28.8.24	More capable than most rivals, but others are more compelling.	3.9	5.1	2546	28.9	-
Range Rover D350 HSE	★★★★½	13.7.22	A fantastically well-isolated luxury car and fully paid-up capable 4x4.	6.3	6.0	2667	35.9	-
Range Rover P550e Autobiography	★★★★☆	9.4.25	A unique and enthralling character that brings added refinement in PHEV form.	4.9	4.0	2979	26.6	44

LEXUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
LBX FWD Premium Plus Design	★★★½☆	29.5.24	Crossover convinces as a small premium car, but only just.	8.4	8.4	1306	45.2	-
NX 350h AWD Premium Plus Pack	★★★★☆	16.3.22	Interesting, refined and efficient, but not as polished as the best.	7.1	6.7	1812	44.7	-
RX 500h F Sport	★★★½☆	22.3.23	Classy and luxurious, but that might not be enough for keener drivers.	6.1	5.5	2088	31.7	-
ES 300h Takumi	★★★½☆	6.2.19	Boldly styled, economical saloon has a singularly rational but dry character.	8.7	7.6	1742	48.8	-
RC F Ultimate Edition	★★★½☆	6.11.24	Bellows in some ways, whispers in others. A little flawed but never dull or boring.	4.7	3.8	1733	30.1	-
LM 350h AWD Takumi	★★★☆☆	7.2.24	MPV is a fascinating luxury-market curio but no threat to the old-school limo.	8.6	8.2	2368	40.5	-

LOTUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Emira V6 First Edition	★★★★½	2.4.25	The British sports car is alive, well and expensive.	4.4	4.0	1493	29.0	–
Eletre R	★★★½☆	24.7.24	There's plenty to like about the new Lotus but little sign of the old Lotus.	3.1	2.2	2682	-	216

MASERATI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghibli Diesel	★★★½☆	12.3.14	Saloon isn't lacking in style but is a little short on substance.	6.5	6.0	2040	40.4	-
Grecale Trofeo	★★★½☆	18.10.23	A belting engine but high-priced and not the best-driving Grecale.	3.6	3.2	2097	33.6	-
Levante Diesel	★★★☆☆	30.11.16	A mildly interesting also-ran, with a weak engine and so-so handling.	6.8	6.9	2205	41.5	-
Levante S Granlusso	★★★½☆	8.5.19	Better engine improves the class's curate's egg but can't redeem it.	5.1	4.5	2232	23.7	-
Granturismo Trofeo	★★★½☆	11.9.24	An appealing grand tourer that lacks some sophistication for the price.	3.6	3.1	-	33.0	-
Granturismo Folgore	★★★½☆	26.2.25	Assured and likeable but could only ever be bought with the heart – even sans V8.	2.9	2.3	2358	2.3	183
MC20 Cielo	★★★★☆	16.10.24	Dynamic iconoclast, old-school charmer, occasional GT. A unique supercar.	4.0	2.8	1783	29.6	-

MAZDA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 1.5 Skyactiv-G 90PS SE-L Nav	★★★★☆	22.4.15	The go-to option for keen drivers is also a convincing all-rounder.	10.4	11.0	1050	-	-
3 2.0 Skyactiv-X 181PS GT Sport	★★★★☆	6.11.19	Sweet to drive and great to behold, but the Skyactiv-X engine is no knockout.	9.1	9.1	1425	57.0	-
MX-30 145PS GT Sport Tech	★★★½☆	10.3.21	Has smart looks and a plush interior, but the first Mazda EV deserved more.	9.1	8.6	1663	-	-
CX-30 2.5 e-Skyactiv G Exclusive-Line	★★★★☆	19.2.25	Alternative powertrain is a credit to this voluble, unconventional compact SUV.	7.6	7.6	1422	45.2	-
CX-5 2.2D 150PS 2WD Sport Nav	★★★★☆	28.6.17	Still moderately left of field but now likeable in greater proportions.	9.4	9.2	1620	53.9	-
CX-60 e-Skyactiv D 3.3 RWD Exclusive-Line	★★★½☆	10.5.23	Old-school in all the best ways, but the ride is difficult to overlook.	7.6	7.2	1893	52.3	-

*For three weeks from publication date

Chrysler interior image is illustrative. No photo is available

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
MX-5 1.5 SE-L Nav	★★★★⯪	2.9.15	An outstanding and usable sports car at an outstanding price.	8.4	7.9	1050	-	-

McLAREN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
720S	★★★★★	24.5.17	Sufficiently complete and exciting to dominate rivals and hugely fast.	2.9	2.0	1419	24.2	-
750S	★★★★☆	19.6.24	McLaren's mainstay is a bit of a wild child – at times, to its own cost.	2.9	2.0	1412	28.8	-
Artura	★★★★⯪	19.10.22	Brilliantly packaged, invitingly poised and wise use of electrification.	3.2	2.1	1552	32.9	17
Artura Spider	★★★★⯪	6.11.24	Artura finds extra form in convertible guise.	3.1	2.2	1618	27.2	17
GT	★★★⯪☆	27.1.21	Plenty of pace and purity, less GT-typical usability and refinement.	3.3	2.3	1580	34.2	

MERCEDES-AMG

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A45 S 4Matic+ Plus	★★★★⯪	4.3.20	AMG brings its hottest hatch yet to life without harming usability.	4.1	3.3	1661	41.5	-
C63 S E Performance 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus Estate	★★★☆☆	31.7.24	Fascinating engineering feat falls flat as an exciting super-estate.	3.3	2.8	2217	27.1	7.1
GT 63 4Matic+ 4-Door Coupé	★★★★⯪	13.3.19	AMG defies physics with a four-door GT that handles beautifully.	3.3	2.7	2135	30.1	-
GT 63 S E Performance 4-Door Coupé	★★★⯪☆	21.6.23	Rocket-ship GT with astonishing powertrain but still lacks driver reward.	2.9	2.5	2339	23.9	6
EQS 53 4Matic+ Night Edition	★★★★☆	8.6.22	Good but doesn't quite live up to its spectacular on-paper potential.	3.6	2.8	2673	-	259
S63 E Performance Night Edition	★★★★☆	2.10.24	Prodigiously quick, confoundingly slick in its handling, but has a coarseness to it.	3.5	2.7	2666	26.1	-
GLE 53 4Matic+ Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	14.10.20	Remarkable dynamic versatility but lacks some driver appeal.	5.4	4.9	2471	29.4	-
SL 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	26.7.23	Stonking V8 doesn't quite redeem a car of as many sacrifices as gains.	3.5	2.8	1939	26.2	-
GT 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus Coupé	★★★⯪☆	14.8.24	Fearsomely quick and truly usable but less lovable than before.	3.1	2.7	1972	30.7	-

MERCEDES-BENZ

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A200 AMG Line Executive	★★★★☆	24.5.23	Significant progress for a keen-handling and efficient premium hatch.	7.8	7.3	1396	59.3	-
A250e AMG Line Premium	★★★☆☆	5.8.20	Falls some way short of a rounded 'premium' driving experience.	6.7	5.4	1665	57.8	-
B180 Sport	★★★★☆	3.4.19	In an ever-shrinking niche, this compact MPV deserves consideration.	8.4	8.3	1405	51.3	-
CLA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★☆☆	21.8.19	Nearer the mark to look at but still way wide of it as a driver's car.	6.8	6.1	1555	48.3	-
C300e AMG Line	★★★★⯪	4.5.22	Long-range hybrid tech gives C-Class an outstanding selling point.	5.8	5.1	2005	49.0	48
E220d AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★★☆	3.1.24	An effective blend of convention, comfort, luxury and modernity.	7.2	5.9	1917	65.8	-
E450d Estate Exclusive Premium Plus	★★★★⯪	19.3.25	Big-hearted diesel has speed, space and opulence. The only car you would ever need.	4.9	4.3	2167	46.1	-
EQE 350+ AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	4.1.23	Hot on comfort and tech but lacklustre on range, material quality and space.	6.0	5.5	2386	-	262
EQS 450 Business Class SUV	★★★⯪☆	6.3.24	Ultra-luxurious seven-seater strays confusingly into MPV territory.	5.5	5.2	2899	-	265
S580e L AMG Line Premium Plus Executive	★★★★⯪	6.4.22	Plug-in S-Class is the best of an otherwise ordinary generation.	5.2	4.2	2530	37.0	45
EQA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★☆☆	17.11.21	Competent but entirely average. For the money, we expect better.	8.4	7.6	2030	-	200
GLB 220d 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★⯪☆	16.9.20	Smart looking and practical but its identity feels stretched at times.	7.4	7.1	1810	55.4	-
EQB 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★⯪☆	18.5.22	A versatile premium EV that doesn't easily command its premium.	7.7	6.8	2235	-	-
GLC 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	13.9.23	Shines in places but doesn't notably elevate the GLC proposition.	6.5	6.0	1929	41.2	-
GLS 400d 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★⯪☆	12.2.20	Has much to commend it but not enough to be the S-Class of SUVs.	6.5	6.0	2634	38.2	-
G350d AMG Line	★★★★☆	17.7.19	Customary capability, charm and ego, now with 21st-century luxury.	7.5	7.2	2451	31.3	-
G500 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★★☆	25.9.24	Anachronistic, iconoclastic and expensive but very hard not to love.	5.1	4.5	–	30.7	-
CLE 300e AMG Line Premium Plus Coupé	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Electrification brings traditional Merc strengths to a desirable mid-sized coupé.	6.1	5.5	2122	37.1	49

MG

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3 Hybrid+ Trophy	★★★⯪☆	12.6.24	Good value and with no serious vices but still lacks a final layer of polish.	6.8	6.2	1311	47.9	-
4 EV Long Range SE	★★★★☆	5.4.23	Good value, useful and fun to drive to boot.	7.1	6.1	1692	-	185
5 SW EV Exclusive	★★★⯪☆	25.11.20	MG's second EV does cheap motoring much better than the first.	8.0	7.1	1538	-	161
ZS EV Exclusive	★★★☆☆	4.12.19	Practical, affordable MG fails to truly move the game on.	8.9	8.0	1556	-	113
ZS Hybrid+ Trophy	★★★☆☆	22.1.25	Roomier, cleverer and better-equipped than you would expect for the money.	7.6	6.6	1422	41.5	-

MINI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Countryman C Exclusive	★★★⯪☆	17.4.24	Spacious but sends mixed messages on family-friendly refinement.	8.7	7.7	1618	46.9	-
Aceman SE Exclusive	★★★⯪☆	8.1.25	Compact SUV has the usual Mini charm but limited extra grown-up appeal.	6.8	5.7	1756	3.1	162

MORGAN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Plus Four	★★★⯪☆	12.8.20	Refreshing and fun in that true Morgan way but lacks a little polish.	5.1	4.3	1013	54.0	-
Plus Six	★★★★☆	10.4.24	The individualist's sports car made better.	4.4	3.3	1188	37.2	-
Super 3	★★★★⯪	9.11.22	Adds some subtle modernity to the 3 Wheeler's endless giggles.	6.9	5.9	644	43.5	-

NISSAN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Juke 1.0 DIG-T 117 Tekna	★★★⯪☆	29.1.20	Impressive in some respects but outstanding in few.	11.9	11.8	1256	46.0	-
Qashqai 1.3 DIG-T 158 Tekna	★★★★☆	28.7.21	Ticks the important family car boxes but its powertrain frustrates.	10.0	9.3	1412	44.9	-
Ariya 87kWh Evolve	★★★⯪☆	26.10.22	Surprisingly traditional and luxurious but not wholly successful.	8.2	6.4	2109	-	-
X-Trail e-Power e-4orce AWD Tekna	★★★★☆	22.2.23	Capable all-rounder that deals effortlessly with everyday life.	6.6	6.0	1947	33.8	-

OMODA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
5 1.6 TGDI Comfort	★★⯪☆☆	20.11.24	Chinese SUV has some promise as a purely rational buy but feels under-developed.	7.4	6.3	1474	38.2	-

PEUGEOT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
e-208 Allure Premium	★★★★☆	6.5.20	Stylish, drivable, usable, reasonably priced – and the best small EV	-	-	1455	38.2	-
308 1.2T Puretech 130 GT	★★★★☆	25.5.22	A reminder of the old Peugeot magic. Small, supple and a bit special.	9.5	9.2	1358	55.3	-
408 Hybrid 180 GT e-EAT8	★★★★☆	11.10.23	Novel Peugeot shows an alternative path for the family car.	8.2	7.3	1746	42.1	40
508 BlueHDi 180 S&S GT Auto	★★★★☆	24.10.18	Stylish and likeable but lacking the polish of more premium rivals.	8.8	8.5	1671	52.0	-
508 SW Hybrid 225 S&S Allure e-EAT8	★★★★☆	8.7.20	This is a comfortable car that looks smart and feels classy.	-	-	1720	-	-

TOP 3

BEST HOT HATCHES

1 Toyota GR Yaris

2 Honda Civic Type R

3 Ford Focus ST

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
508 SW Hybrid4 PSE	★★★★☆	5.5.21	Hits notable handling highs but feels less than sharp elsewhere.	5.7	4.7	1892	44.0	-
e-2008 GT Line	★★★½☆	30.9.20	Cheaper versions impress; pricier ones won't worry class leaders.	9.5	8.9	1638	-	-
3008 1.6 BlueHDi 120 GT Line	★★★½☆	18.1.17	In challenging company, the 3008 promises more than it delivers.	12.0	12.1	1300	53.2	-
e-3008 73kWh Allure	★★★½☆	4.8.24	Electric family SUV is rich, handsome and refined but no technical tour de force.	8.5	7.1	2132	-	219
5008 Hybrid 136 GT	★★★☆☆	12.2.25	Concept car style can't save the function-follows-form engineering.	9.9	9.4	1736	44.0	-

POLESTAR

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 BST Edition 270	★★★½☆	12.4.23	A creditable attempt at electric car thrills, although not quite fully formed.	4.5	3.4	2161	-	188
3 Long Range Dual Motor Launch Edition	★★★★☆	12.2.25	Electric SUV is spacious, attractive and enticing to drive - with a few lapses.	4.6	3.8	2610	2.3	235

PORSCHE

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
718 Boxster	★★★★½	8.6.16	Better than ever objectively, but at the expense of vital subjective appeal.	5.4	4.3	1395	35.9	-
718 Cayman S	★★★★½	10.8.16	Still the greatest sports coupé out there, even if it doesn't sound like it.	4.8	3.9	1430	-	-
718 Spyder	★★★★½	1.4.20	Spyder's flat six rectifies most, if not quite all, of the 718's shortcomings.	4.3	3.5	1350	30.1	-
718 Cayman GT4 RS	★★★★★	14.9.22	A feast of noise, revs, handling poise and thrills. Incredibly special.	3.9	3.0	1444	27.1	-
911 GT3 PDK	★★★★½	11.8.21	Less versatile than some past GT3s but still spectacularly good.	3.4	2.7	1430	29.2	-
911 Turbo S	★★★★½	10.8.22	Has a questionable raison d'être but is engaging and awesomely capable.	2.5	2.0	1640	36.3	-
911 Carrera T	★★★★☆	30.8.23	Sharper 911 has a likeable simplicity but makes key compromises.	4.9	3.8	1456	39.1	-
911 GT3 RS	★★★★½	22.11.23	Esoteric even by hardcore 911 standards but simply monumental.	3.2	2.5	1476	26.7	-
911 Dakar	★★★★☆	10.1.24	Rally-raid-themed throwback charms like no other modern 911.	3.3	2.6	1660	36.0	-
911 S/T	★★★★★	3.7.24	Porsche's GT division alters its recipe to deliver an all-time great.	3.7	2.6	1408	30.9	-
911 Carrera GTS	★★★★½	5.3.25	Hybrid tech punts barnstorming Carrera into the supercar sphere.	2.8	2.6	1607	34.3	-
Macan Turbo	★★★★½	4.6.14	Luxury SUV meets sports car in a compact, well-priced package.	4.7	4.3	2050	30.9	-
Macan Turbo Electric	★★★½☆	19.2.25	Otherwise appealing EV is undone by chassis tech.	3.0	2.5	–	2.1	219
Cayenne S	★★★★½	21.2.24	Rebooted Cayenne impresses and the charming V8 is our pick.	5.0	4.3	2256	28.8	-
Cayenne Turbo	★★★★☆	5.9.18	As impressive as ever but not quite the driver's car it once was.	3.9	3.4	2307	31.5	-
Cayenne Turbo S E-Hybrid	★★★½☆	27.5.20	Technically impressive but fails to make a convincing case for itself.	-	-	2490	-	-
Cayenne Turbo GT Coupé	★★★★☆	20.7.22	Uncompromising rapid SUV is a bit of a monster – but a likeable one.	3.1	2.7	2251	26.1	-
Panamera 4 E-Hybrid	★★★★☆	22.1.25	Understated plug-in hybrid is a Swiss Army knife super-saloon.	3.8	2.4	2370	30.1	29
Taycan Turbo S	★★★★½	30.10.24	Porsche deftly keeps its superb EV on the boil.	2.6	1.9	2356	2.7	233

TOP 3

BEST CHEAP USED ELECTRIC CARS

1 BMW i3

2 Tesla Model 3

3 Volkswagen e-Up

SCAN THE
CODE TO SEE
THE TOP 10

RENAULT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Clio TCe 100 Iconic	★★★★½	27.11.19	Plusher, smoother, more mature. A car of substance as well as style.	11.6	10.9	1138	56.9	-
5 E-Tech Comfort Range Iconic Five	★★★★½	12.3.25	Accomplished and well priced, the 5 changes the affordable EV game.	7.7	7.2	1461	3.1	166
Megane E-Tech Techno	★★★½☆	23.11.22	Likeable and eye-catching, but rivals have moved the EV game on.	6.9	5.4	1688	-	198
Captur TCe 130 S-Edition EDC	★★★½☆	18.3.20	Second-generation Captur should prove popular, but not with this powertrain.	9.4	9.2	1363	53.1	-
Arkana E-Tech Hybrid 145 S-Edition	★★★½☆	13.10.21	Showy styling clothes an eminently sensible but unspectacular car.	11.0	10.1	1365	58.3	-
Scenic E-Tech Iconic Long Range	★★★★☆	26.6.24	The Scenic finally conforms but does so with style and substance.	8.1	6.3	1916	-	313
Austral E-Tech Iconic Esprit Alpine	★★★½☆	19.7.23	Clever hybrid and pleasant cabin but let down by clumsy dynamics.	8.5	6.9	1696	43.5	-

ROLLS-ROYCE

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghost	★★★★½	13.1.21	Most technologically advanced Rolls-Royce is an exceptional limo.	4.7	3.8	2490	28.5	-
Phantom	★★★★★	4.4.18	The world's greatest and finest luxury car is now also the very best.	5.5	4.4	2780	28.4	-
Spectre	★★★★½	20.12.23	Superbly lavish and intoxicatingly refined, if shy of epoch-making.	4.1	3.1	2935	-	245
Cullinan Black Badge	★★★★☆	19.2.20	Far more likeable to drive than look at, for those who have a use for it.	4.9	4.2	2739	23.6	-

SEAT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ibiza 1.0 TSI SE Technology	★★★★½	19.7.17	Grown-up supermini shows its rivals how it's done – in most respects.	10.0	10.0	1047	55.6	-
Leon eHybrid FR	★★★½☆	2.12.20	Competent and efficient but verges on being forgettable to drive.	7.2	6.2	1558	46.3	26
Arona 1.0 TSI SE Technology	★★★★☆	15.11.17	Polished, mature all-rounder has since lost its class-best crown.	10.5	10.7	1149	40.9	-
Ateca 1.5 Eco TSI FR Black Edition DSG	★★★☆☆	25.10.23	Once-appealing Nissan Qashqai rival now shows some signs of neglect.	8.9	8.0	1396	44.4	-

SKODA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Fabia 1.0 TSI 95PS SE Comfort	★★★★½	9.2.22	Comfy, spacious and good value, this supermini is Skoda at its best.	9.9	9.7	1117	58.7	-
Scala SE 1.5 TSI 150PS DSG	★★★½☆	31.7.19	Different from the bigger Octavia but perhaps not by enough.	7.9	7.3	1200	52.9	-
Octavia 2.0 TDI 150PS SE L First Edition Estate DSG	★★★★☆	2.9.20	Leads the charge to take Skoda upmarket and mostly succeeds.	8.4	8.7	1510	73.0	-
Octavia Estate vRS	★★★★☆	29.1.25	A fine estate made more engaging rather than a great hot hatch made a bit bigger.	5.9	4.8	–	37.6	-
Superb SE L 2.0 TDI 150PS Estate	★★★★★	17.7.24	The large, functional estate car modernised in all the right ways.	8.4	8.2	1673	68.7	-
Karoq 2.0 TDI 150PS Scout	★★★½☆	30.1.19	Practical, comfortable Skoda is short on charm and dynamic polish.	8.9	9.6	1629	47.1	-
Elroq 85 Edition	★★★★½	19.3.25	Comfortable, efficient, practical and intuitive; a well-rounded, class-topping EV.	6.1	5.0	2085	3.5	246
Enyaq iV 80 Lounge	★★★★☆	18.8.21	Practical, rangy, well priced. Hits a sweet spot in the EV market.	8.3	7.8	2098	-	262

SMART

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
#1 Premium	★★★½☆	8.11.23	Drivability frustrations mar an otherwise agreeable experience.	5.6	4.6	1861	-	229
#3 Premium	★★★½☆	15.5.24	Makings of an interesting alternative EV but let down by the finer details.	5.7	4.9	1832	-	205

SUBARU

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Crosstrek 2.0i e-Boxer Touring	★★★½☆	28.2.24	Improved manners for junior off-roader are welcome, if not transformative.	10.4	10.4	1620	45.3	-
Outback 2.5i Lineartronic Touring	★★★½☆	27.9.23	A pretty good answer to a question that only a few people asked.	9.3	8.7	1690	42.8	-
Solterra AWD Touring	★★★☆☆	15.3.23	A hint of Subaru-typical capability doesn't take this EV quite far enough.	6.7	6.2	2051	-	169

SUZUKI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Across 2.5 PHEV E-Four CVT	★★★★½	7.4.21	Excellent hybrid powertrain makes it one of the best PHEVs around.	6.4	5.8	1966	44.4	48

TESLA

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Model 3 Standard Range Plus	★★★★☆	4.9.19	Wrinkles aside, it offers great electric performance and usability at this price.	5.8	4.7	1633	-	156
Model 3 Long Range	★★★★☆	14.2.24	Packs a real punch. Both updated Model 3s are fine propositions.	4.4	3.4	1846	-	277
Model Y Long Range AWD	★★★★☆	23.3.22	A far better electric car than a premium SUV.	4.7	3.6	1978	-	234
Model S P90D	★★★★½	20.4.16	Great EV, intriguing driver's car. Not quite the perfect luxury GT.	3.5	3.0	2220	-	214
Model S Plaid	★★★½☆	2.8.23	Astonishing pace but not a fully rounded performance saloon.	2.4	1.7	2220	-	301
Model X 90D	★★★★☆	15.2.17	High-rise EV strains under SUV brief but still feels like a history maker.	5.2	4.2	2508	-	147

TOYOTA

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Aygo X Limited Edition	★★★½☆	11.5.22	A mostly very grown-up small car but also an expensive one.	15.6	16.5	974	58.7	-
Yaris 1.5 Hybrid Design	★★★★☆	23.9.20	Grows not only in stature but also in ability and subjective appeal.	9.2	8.8	1140	65.0	-
GR Yaris Circuit Pack	★★★★★	3.3.21	Toyota, on a roll with driver's cars, provides yet another winner.	5.2	5.0	1283	39.2	-
Corolla 2.0 Hybrid Design Touring Sports	★★★★☆	5.6.19	A big step up for Toyota in a vital sector and a better hybrid to boot.	8.5	7.7	1537	52.6	-
Prius Plug-in Design	★★★★☆	23.4.25	Better late than never for best Prius to date.	6.6	5.6	1542	56.1	46
bZ4X AWD Vision	★★★½☆	18.1.23	A decent effort all round but not exceptional in any way.	6.4	5.9	2023	-	208
Mirai Design Premium	★★★★☆	16.6.21	Impressive hydrogen fuel cell car has made strides but remains hamstrung overall.	8.7	8.3	1937	-	-
GR Supra Pro	★★★★☆	14.8.19	Fast, usable and has plenty going for it but leaves us wanting more.	4.4	3.6	1495	39.0	-
Hilux 2.8 D-4D GR Sport	★★★½☆	1.3.23	Gazoo-branded Ford Ranger Raptor rival is formidable but lacks fun factor.	10.0	9.5	2241	32.5	-

VAUXHALL

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corsa 1.2 Turbo 100PS Ultimate Nav Auto	★★★½☆	22.1.20	Supermini is improved in many ways but lacks the appeal to match its price.	11.2	11.5	1171	51.8	-
Astra 1.2 Turbo 130PS GS Line	★★★½☆	5.10.22	Family hatchback's gentle push upmarket is only a qualified success.	9.9	9.2	1304	55.3	-
Crossland X 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite	★★★☆☆	7.6.17	Typically practical and well priced, but Vauxhall can do better.	9.8	10.3	1278	54.2	-
Mokka 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite Nav Premium Auto	★★★½☆	12.5.21	The driving experience sells a brave design effort just a little short.	9.3	9.1	1238	48.6	-
Grandland X Hybrid4 Ultimate Nav	★★★☆☆	22.4.20	Inspires big expectations and delivers few, but it's an interesting fleet option.	-	-	1800	-	-
Combo Life 1.5 Turbo D 100PS Energy	★★★½☆	27.12.18	Usable, spacious and practical, if not very pretty to look at.	14.7	16.2	1552	60.1	-

VOLKSWAGEN

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Polo 1.0 TSI 95PS SE	★★★★½	31.1.18	Brings 'big car' space, class, kit and finish to this class like never before.	10.7	11.2	1145	57.1	-
Polo 2.0 TSI GTI+	★★★★☆	1.8.18	A usable, quick and vastly competent effort but not the most thrilling.	6.7	5.9	1342	46.8	-
Golf 1.5 eTSI 150PS Style DSG	★★★★½	22.7.20	Additional strengths and familiar ones carry it back to the class lead.	8.3	7.8	1330	60.0	-
Golf 1.5 TSI eHybrid Style	★★★★½	23.10.24	New plug-in Golf takes the PHEV hatchback's status to greater heights.	7.2	6.1	1619	46.5	-
Golf GTI	★★★½☆	25.9.24	'Mk8.5' version of hot hatchback is slick and effective but not a big enough step forward.	5.3	4.4	–	47.2	-
Golf R	★★★★☆	14.4.21	Most entertaining distillation of the Golf R formula yet – for a price.	4.4	3.7	1520	43.9	-
ID 3 Pro Performance Life	★★★★☆	31.3.21	Bland but with the substance to further the zero-emissions push.	7.0	6.5	1757	-	145
Arteon 2.0 BiTDI 240PS 4Motion R-Line	★★★½☆	27.9.17	Considered approach produces an executive flagship short on sparkle.	6.5	6.2	1866	55.6	-
Arteon eHybrid Elegance Shooting Brake	★★★½☆	9.6.21	Striking PHEV appears radical but upholds Volkswagen's traditions at heart.	7.1	6.0	1783	52.5	-
ID 7 Pro Match	★★★★½	13.3.24	Volkswagen finds some electric form in an unexpected format.	6.1	5.1	2162	-	239
T-Roc 2.0 TSI 190PS 4Motion SEL DSG	★★★★½	24.1.18	Shows performance verve, dynamic completeness and stylish swagger.	6.7	6.5	1534	37.5	-
T-Roc 1.5 TSI Evo R-Line Cabriolet DSG	★★½☆☆	10.6.20	It brings little worth having to the compact cabriolet niche.	-	-	1540	-	-
Tiguan 1.5 eTSI 150PS R-Line	★★★½☆	22.5.24	Functional and mature, but this isn't the engine or trim we would go for.	9.4	9.2	1606	44.9	-
ID 4 GTX Max	★★★½☆	27.10.21	GTX adds flavour to ID 4 but doesn't reimagine 'GTI' for the EV age.	6.2	5.6	2220	-	200
Touareg 3.0 TDI 4Motion R-Line Tech	★★★½☆	8.8.18	An inoffensive if forgettable bid at a luxury market breakthrough.	7.2	6.6	2292	41.6	-
Touareg 3.0 TSI eHybrid 4Motion Elegance	★★★½☆	5.6.24	It's versatile and likeably unpretentious but won't be a default company car choice.	6.2	5.7	2446	34.1	26
Touran 2.0 TDI 150PS SE Family DSG	★★★★☆	3.2.16	A spacious, refined and classy all-rounder – albeit a slightly bland one.	9.9	9.7	1666	-	-
Multivan 1.4 eHybrid Style	★★★★☆	8.3.23	Latest Volkswagen 'bus combines the best bits of both car and van.	8.4	7.1	2243	37.9	14
ID Buzz 77kWh Style Pro	★★★★☆	8.2.23	It costs plenty but offers versatility and luxury accomplishments.	9.5	9.1	2498	-	185
Grand California 600	★★★½☆	2.1.20	Grandest California is classy but not half as clever as its smaller namesake.	15.8	16.7	3095	28.5	-
Transporter Sportline Black Edition Kombi SWB	★★★☆☆	30.3.22	Not compromised but hardly enhanced by its sporting agenda.	9.1	9.0	2108	39.1	-
Passat eHybrid 204PS Elegance	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Rounded and with good PHEV credentials, but less compelling than its sister car.	7.2	6.4	1836	44.5	73

VOLVO

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
EX30 Single Motor Extended Range Plus	★★★☆☆	1.5.24	Not enough key strengths – and not enough Volvo pragmatism.	5.7	5.1	1779	-	179
C40 Recharge Twin Ultimate	★★★½☆	13.4.22	A transitional model for Volvo that doesn't go quite far enough.	4.4	3.6	2172	-	194
XC40 D4 AWD First Edition	★★★★½	7.2.18	Wieldy, classy and simple. As good as its bigger brothers, if not better.	8.5	8.5	1735	43.8	-
XC60 D4 AWD R-Design	★★★½☆	5.7.17	The right product at the right time but lacking the right dynamic finish.	8.9	8.9	1836	48.9	-
XC90 D5 AWD Momentum	★★★★☆	17.6.15	A very impressive all-rounder with its own distinctive appeal.	8.3	8.3	2076	-	-
V60 D4 Momentum Pro Auto	★★★★☆	27.6.18	Fine-looking, capable and practical estate with only a few demerits.	8.9	8.3	1669	43.1	-
V60 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★½	21.9.22	Strong hybrid system gives ageing Volvo a lot of fresh appeal.	4.9	4.3	2036	38.0	51
V90 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★½	11.11.20	Hardly revolutionary but exceptionally appealing nonetheless.	5.6	4.9	2109	41.9	-

XPENG

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
G6 RWD Standard Range	★★★½☆	26.2.25	Chinese electric SUV lacks inspiration but has plenty of rational appeal.	6.8	6.2	2067	3.3	208

WHAT'S COMING WHEN

Alpine A390 **Spring 2026**
Meet the "A110 for five". The A390 will be the brand's first SUV – and, yes, it will be electric.

Mini Cooper JCW EV **May**
Electric version of the Cooper hatchback gets 254bhp yet remains front-wheel drive.

Nissan Micra **October**
Small EV is based on Renault's 5 but much of the engineering work is being done in the UK.

SCAN THE CODE FOR THE FULL LIST

Why I love... TEST MULES

BY JACK HARRISON

From an E39 BMW M5 Touring hiding the V12 destined for the McLaren F1 to a Holden ute with the cabin and rear-mounted V8 from a C8 Corvette, nothing in the world of test mules is ever as it seems.

I began my descent down this deep, murky and often mind-boggling rabbit hole while reading a July 2015 issue of Autocar. At the end of the news section was the headline 'Alpine secrets uncovered' – something I thought had to be a mistake, as the pictures clearly showed a previous-generation Lotus Exige. On closer inspection, though, I began to notice abnormalities: wider wheel arches, a strange bumper, a paddle-shift gearbox. How odd.

Two years later, the A110 would arrive with that telltale lower bumper looking almost identical to that prototype – a tradition the brand has maintained in recent times by disguising A390 mules with old Dacia Duster bodies and A310 test cars with the shells of Ligier JS2 Rs.

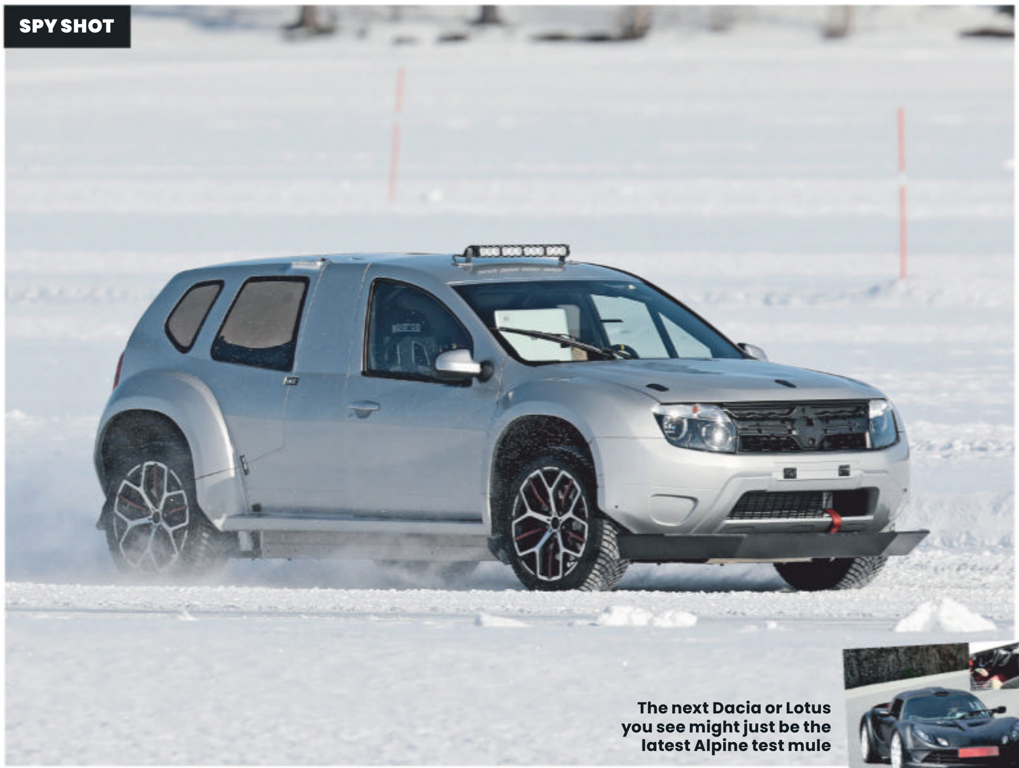
If I were to pity any form of vehicle, it would be the lowly test mule. Acting as square one for any new technology that finds its way onto our roads, they're created for one purpose: to be relentlessly abused in the pursuit of progress.

There are stories of Opel Omega As being driven around Australia during the development of the related VN Holden Commodore until they literally split in half. Without their noble sacrifice, would the Aussies have known that the shell and chassis needed serious strengthening to cope with their harsh climate? Maybe not, and we would have held that particular Commodore in infamy for having a mildly irritating habit of trying to become two cars at once.

FIRST PICTURES

BMW's RangeRover unleashed

This unholy marriage of E53 X5 and E39 5 Series was used to develop a 2004 X7 SUV that BMW ultimately cancelled



SPY SHOT

The next Dacia or Lotus you see might just be the latest Alpine test mule

Alpine secrets uncovered

> **"They're created for one purpose: to be relentlessly abused"**

Of course, from an engineering perspective, a test mule can be an incredibly rewarding thing. Trying out unproven technologies in a four-wheeled test bed is a great way to develop technological breakthroughs, even if the car or the system in question never makes production.

It's alleged that Lotus used a Ferrari 458 to develop an all-new V8 engine for the Danny Bahar-era Esprit, neither of which saw the light of day, instead being sent off for an unpleasant date with an East Anglian crusher.

How far is too far when it comes to test mules? Porsche found out in the 1980s with its radical PEP, a tube-framed mishmash of 928 and 944 bits with a 911 engine that could be placed at the front, in the middle or hanging over the rear of the variable-length powertrain. The result? A car that proved simply too primitive for engineers to make any real assessment of any configuration.

There are too many bizarre test mules to list: the TVR Cerberas used to develop the Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren are a favourite of mine, and I couldn't fail to mention the V12-engined, rear-driven L322 Range Rover concocted to test a flagship model that we never got. But one of the best-known is an unassuming Austin Metro van hiding a Rover K-series engine under a clamshell rear hatch, built to make sure it would work in the MGF. It's in the British Motor Museum, and I implore you to go and have a poke around for yourself. You might even see a new Jaguar test mule on your way in.

What we did this week

THE REAL SCOOBY-DOO

I've had chats with lots of big names at motor shows but none more enjoyable than my confab with Lettie, one of several rescue dogs on Subaru's New York show stand as part of an initiative to support shelters and promote adoption. Sadly, pesky quarantine rules scuppered my plan for Lettie to become Autocar's new office dog.

JAMES ATTWOOD

CHANEL, GUCCI, PEUGEOT

I love a bit of retro motorsport clobber, and this old Paris-Dakar Rally jacket seemed just the ticket – until I spotted the €250 price tag. It strikes me that the worlds of cars and high fashion are very quickly colliding...

CHARLIE MARTIN

AUDI YOU DO WITHOUT ONE?

Moving house is an arduous task, so when the time came to shift all my belongings a few weeks ago, I was grateful that I had a thumping great Audi Q7 PHEV in for review. This SUV swallowed a room's worth of stuff with ease and there was even space to spare – not that the picture shows it. Never say we don't push these cars to the limit!

SAM PHILLIPS

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Maximum range on a full charge for a CUPRA Tavascan is 298.9 - 353.6 miles (official test WLTP figures) depending on the trim. Official fuel consumption for the Tavascan mpg (litres/100km) combined: N/A. Combined CO_2 emissions: 0g/km. Test data obtained under standardised conditions after the battery had been fully charged (to 100%). The Tavascan is a battery electric vehicle requiring mains electricity for charging. Figures shown are for comparability purposes and may vary by trim. Only compare fuel consumption, CO_2 and electric range figures with other vehicles tested to the same technical procedures. These figures may not reflect real life driving results, which will depend upon a number of factors including the starting charge of the battery, accessories fitted (post-registration), variations in weather, driving styles, route conditions, speed, vehicle and battery age and vehicle load. Zero emissions while driving. Data correct at December 2024.